THE FOREST MONKS OF SRI LANKA

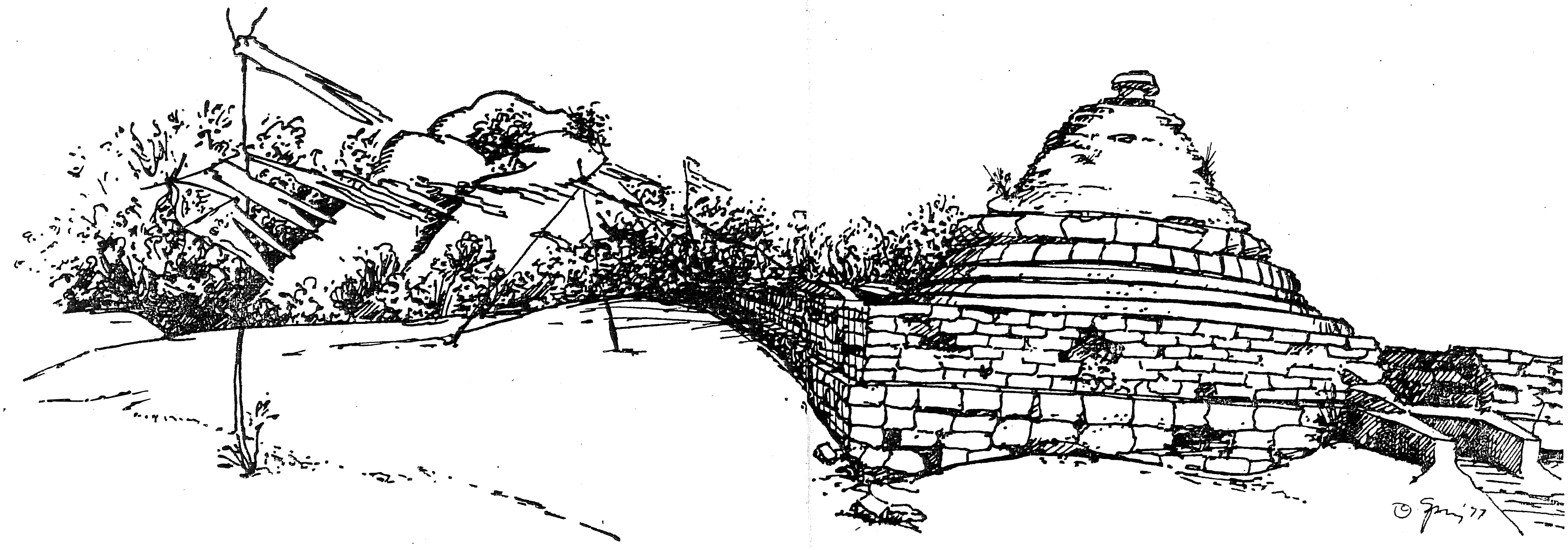
An Anthropological and Historical Study

MICHAEL CARRITHERS

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The stupa at Kuḍumbigala Forest Hermitage. Dated in the first millennium A.D., this stupa has been reconstructed but not plastered. A relic is found in the centre of the stupa, and the flags are votive offerings. Kuḍumbigala is described in the Conclusion.

Wenn es nur einmal so ganz stille wäre.
Wenn das Zufällige und Ungefähre
verstummte und das nachbarliche Lachen,
wenn das Geräusch, das meine Sinne machen,
mich nicht so sehr verhinderte am Wachen . . .

Rilke, *Das Stundenbuch*

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To My Parents

Though Sri Lanka had been given that name by the time I was doing my research, English-speaking Ceylonese still habitually spoke of the island as Ceylon, and it was as Ceylon that I thought of it when I wrote this book. In Sinhalese, of course, it is called Lankāva, and perhaps I would do best by calling it that. But out of deference to my patriotic Ceylonese readers, I have used 'Sri Lanka' on the title; and out of deference to my long-suffering publishers, I have retained 'Ceylon' in the text without asking them to alter it.

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The deep forest at Kuḍumbigala. An ancient stupa, reconstructed, on the rock above, a lay devotee on an errand below.

Two monks' cells. Kuḍumbigala.

A monk in his cell. The bed is concrete.

A monk in typically composed posture.

Monks preparing to worship the stupa atop the rock at Kuḍumbigala. The monk in the centre will kneel on his folded mat.

A monk's cell. Kuḍumbigala.

Monks going to bathe near Kuḍumbigala.
A lay devotee in the background.

Monks taking afternoon tea after a sea bath.
Monks do not eat, but may take liquids, after noon.

Jinavaṃsa (furthest from camera) and pupil meditating at afternoon worship.

The Venerable Kaḍavädduvē Jinavaṃsa

A class at Kuḍumbigala.

Jinavaṃsa and lay devotees. Learning to be a Buddhist.

Kuḍumbigala. The head monk (back to camera) gives last instructions before he leaves on a journey.

Ānandasiri (background) and his chief pupil.

Acknowledgements

Even to attempt to acknowledge the uncounted acts of kindness I received from the people of Ceylon would be invidious, for my memory fades and the majority would go unfairly neglected. Instead I will mention only these few. The Venerable Tirāṇagama Ratanasāra and the Venerable Colamba Ñāṇasanta introduced me to the forest monks in the first place. D. M. Colombage and B. L. Fernando taught me to read Sinhala. Aelian Fernando loyally helped me to stay in Ceylon long enough to do what I had set out to do, and placed at my disposal the resources of the United States Educational Foundation. Stanley Sporny, whose drawings grace this book, was my *kalyāṇa mitta*, good companion, and I am deeply grateful to him.

Fieldwork was carried out from September 1972 till May 1975 with a Fulbright grant. I returned in 1977 for five months under the auspices of Wolfson College, Oxford; and made a brief visit in 1979 with help from the London School of Economics and the Spalding Trust. Wolfson College generously enabled me to write this book. Richard Gombrich, taking the view that what people basically need is encouragement, egged me on; and my wife Elizabeth Oughton, far from merely enduring, did so as well.

Guide to Pronunciation

All three relevant languages, Sinhalese or Sinhala, Pali, and Sanskrit, have the same conventions of transliteration into the Roman alphabet, and indeed the learned Sinhalese who are chiefly relevant to this book pronounce Pali and Sanskrit as do Western scholars. Therefore the following rules pertain to all three languages, as pronounced by learned monks.

Ṭ and *ḍ* are retroflex, pronounced by placing the tip of the tongue on the ridge behind the upper front teeth. *T* and *d*, on the other hand, are pronounced by placing the tongue at the base of the upper front teeth. *Ṇ*, though written differently, is in fact pronounced as *n*, as in English. *Ñ* is pronounced as *ny*, and in less formal systems of transliteration is represented as such. There is no difference between *l* and *ḷ*.

G is hard, as in *got*. *C* is always pronounced as English *ch*. *Ṃ* is always like the English *ng*, as in *hang*. *S* is the English *s*, *ś* and *ṣ* are pronounced by the learned as *sh* or sometimes as *sy*, but are often rendered simply *s*. *N̆* and *m̆* are pronounced lightly, almost as nasalizations of the preceding vowel.

V is half-way between the English *v* and the English *w*, and indeed the British in Ceylon nearly always rendered it as *w*.

The vowels are pure, without the English tendency to diphthongization. Quantity is important, so that *a* sounds rather like the vowel in *bun*, while *ā* sounds like *ar* in the British English pronunciation of *bard*. *Ǟ* is rather like a New Yorker's version of the first vowel in *taxi*, and *ä* is a correspondingly shortened version thereof.

And because quantity is important, to the ears of an English speaker it sounds as if the long vowels are accented. But Sinhalese, like French, does not have accent, so the speaker must attempt to place stress as equally as possible throughout a word. Doubled consonants, as in Italian, are doubled in length, so that to an English speaker the first syllable of *Hikkaduva* sounds accented. A consonant followed by an *h*, however, is aspirated, as in *pithead*.

Dramatis Personae

A good deal of the coherence of the modern forest movement, and hence of this account, depends upon the relationships which draw the participants together. Unfortunately their names, like those of the characters in a Russian novel, are not easily distinguishable by an English-speaking reader. The most important of these figures are therefore briefly described here. Monks are known by a monastic name, conferred upon them at their higher ordination, and this is preceded in common usage by their place of origin. I have placed their monastic names first.

Ānandasiri (*Tāmbugala*)

In one way or another Ānandasiri has touched the lives of most of the figures in the modern forest movement. A nephew and pupil of Dēvarakkhita, he was acquainted with Ratanapāla, was practically a pupil of Ñāṇānanda, advised Tāpasa Himi, and eventually became a pupil and colleague of Jinavaṃsa. His biography forms the Conclusion.

Dēvarakkhita (*Kukulnāpē*)

Dēvarakkhita was a scholar-monk of Colombo as well as the incumbent of a village temple in the country during the 1930s. He founded a seminary whose purpose was to train a new generation of forest monks. He taught Ñāṇānanda in particular, but also knew Ratanapāla. See Chapters 8 and 9.

Guṇānanda

A pupil of Ñāṇārāma and Jinavaṃsa whose meditation experiences are recounted in Chapter 11.

Jinavaṃsa (*Kaḍavädduvē*)

The co-founder and leading spirit of the strictest and most effective of the modern forest movements. See Chapters 10, 11, and 12.

Mahākassapa (*Dimbulāgala*)

The twelfth-century monastic leader whose influence in the cause of monastic strictness greatly influenced Dēvarakkhita, Ratanapāla, and especially Ñāṇānanda. See Chapter 9.

Ñāṇānanda (Vaturuvila)

Presently the *mahānāyaka* (chief leader) of his own separate and officially recognized group of forest monks, Ñāṇānanda has struggled for success since 1940. His is one of the two largest groups of forest monks. See Chapter 9.

Ñāṇārāma (Mātara)

The heir in the line of pupillary succession of the nineteenth-century forest monk Paññānanda, Ñāṇārāma was persuaded by Jinavaṃsa to join him in founding a group of forest monks. Ñāṇārāma was responsible for reviving and teaching meditation within the group. See Chapters 10, 11, and 12.

Nyanatiloka

A German, the first continental European ordained a Theravāda monk in modern times, he flourished from 1905 till 1955. He was a learned translator of Buddhist texts and the founder of the Island Hermitage. See Chapter 2.

Paññānanda

Prominent between 1850 till 1887, he was the founder of the two oldest continuously occupied forest hermitages in Ceylon. He was partly responsible for the origin and growth of the strictest of the large monastic 'families' (*nikāya*) in the island today, the Rāmañña Nikāya, and was therefore a predecessor of Jinavaṃsa and Ñāṇārāma. See Chapter 4.

Ratanapāla (Asmaṇḍalē)

He was a village monk from the Kandyan area who underwent a series of physical and spiritual ordeals, became the subject of a revived ceremony of purification, and subsequently left the village to become a forest monk. An associate of Dēvarakkhita, Ñāṇānanda, and later of Jinavaṃsa. He died in 1955. See Chapter 8.

Subodhānanda

A monk who left the robes to become a self-ordained ascetic. He flourished, albeit largely in obscurity, from 1900 till 1956, and was the source of the idea of self-ordination which enjoyed great popularity in the early 1950s. He was indirectly the inspiration, and to an extent the rival, of Tāpasa Himi. See Chapter 7.

Sumana (Kehelpannala)

Associate of Ratanapāla. See Chapter 8.

The Simple Life

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

> All kinds of people do zazen [meditation] for all kinds of reasons. A certain woman I knew, who could never go shopping because half-way to the shop she became obsessed with the idea that her house might be on fire, was more or less cured after a couple of years of sitting. A certain teacher seduced four or five of his pupils in a tent during an excursion; he also sat and meditated on the matter, but I do not know with what result, if any. My own was the opposite reason, disappointed love. This may all seem too trivial, but we must remember that enlightenment is somewhat like history, of which Emerson says, 'In analysing history, do not be too profound, for often the causes are quite superficial'.
>
> Robert Blyth, *Zen and Zen Classics*

> Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past.
>
> *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*

A typical Buddhist hermitage—called an *araṉya senāsanaya*, a forest dwelling—is Madunāgala, set on a rocky eminence in the dry tropical forest of Ceylon's remote south-east. The roughly ten monks who usually live there have separate one-room dwellings spread about the several hundred acres belonging to the hermitage. Some of these are cottages of mud-brick, plaster, and tiles, while others are *gal len*, 'stone caves', rooms built under an overhanging cliff or boulder. Though the monks do gather on occasion during the day, theirs is fundamentally a solitary, meditative life.

These are forest-dwelling—*vanavāsi*—monks. Their solitary life is founded on the proposition that, in the words of one of the first texts they learn, 'Mind is the chief, the maker, the forerunner of things.' They therefore devote themselves to mental and moral self-discipline, since, as the verse continues, 'Suffering follows him who speaks or acts with a spoilt mind, as a cart

wheel follows the step of the ox.'[1] The arrangement of the hermitage, the daily schedule of the monks, their deportment, and their mental training in solitude are in fact all conceived to be arranged around this central necessity, the cultivation of the mind. The prescriptions for the way of life are both detailed and closely reasoned.

This anthropological and historical study of the monks is consequently a study of *thought in action*, of the monks' various attempts to act by their precepts, to embody their ideals. These were attempts in the first instance not to achieve liberation, but to revive the forest-dwelling way of life and re-establish hermitages, whence liberation could be sought. It is relatively recent history: in 1972, when I began fieldwork, the oldest hermitages, small and obscure, were barely a hundred years old, and most of the rest were less than twenty-five years old. This is a study, in other words, of rediscovery, revival, and reform. These are the relevant questions: what precisely is the way of life the monks sought to revive? How did they go about it? What would be the criteria of success? Why did some succeed and some fail? Above all, why are there such marked differences between groups claiming to follow the same ideal?

Early in the book I have given a great deal of attention to answering the first question, what is the model? For the motives and self-understanding of the monks is in many ways especially alien to the modern West. To a secular view their motives are less explicable even than, let us say, those of an Amazonian people, for there at least the drives for sex and satiety may be taken for granted. On the other hand, even to many for whom religious motives are self-explanatory, the strict life of monastic contemplation, rather than of self-abnegating activity, is either incomprehensible or repugnant. I have therefore, in the next chapter, attempted to build a bridge of empathy by means of the European monks; and I have in subsequent chapters concentrated on biography as the most effective method of elucidating motives in social and cultural history.

We learn languages as much by discovering what words do *not* mean as by memorizing what they do mean; so in the rest of this introductory chapter I will present five propositions which were important in my research as working hypotheses at one

[1] This is the first verse of the *Dhammapada*.



A solitary hermit's hut. At Baţuviţa.

point or another, but which had to be modified or rejected in the end. I will also indicate what theses replaced them.

To understand the first hypothesis, we shall have to return to Madunāgala, the forest hermitage. Despite the acrid stench of bat droppings which frequently reaches the room from further back among the crevices, it is the *gal len*, stone caves, which are particularly prized by the monks. The special significance of these may be read from a small lip, or drip-ledge (*kaṭāraṃ*), cut along the front edge of the rock above the room. The practical purpose of the lip is to keep rain water from running back into the cave, which is therefore rendered habitable. To the monks, however, the drip-ledges embody the great antiquity, and therefore the great value, of the forest-dwelling life; for there are inscriptions at Madunāgala which indicate that the drip-ledges were cut, and the site first occupied by monks, in the reign of King Kākavaṇṇa Tissa, before 160 B.C. In their view, just as laymen in the first days of Buddhism in Ceylon prepared caves for the monks, laymen refurbish the same caves today. As in ancient days, the laymen gain merit for their spiritual well-being, and the monk is set on the path to Nirvana.

In contemplating the drip-ledges, therefore, modern monks affirm their solidarity with their ancient forebears, and their writings are full of references to ancient rules, legends, and places. The first proposition is simply that the monks do indeed follow in detail an ancient way of life.

This is quite a credible proposition at first glance. Many monks attend closely to the instructions laid down in their scriptures, the Pali canon, and the scriptures are old. The canon attained roughly its present form by about 300 B.C. in India, and much of the material goes back to the Buddha, a century or two earlier.[2] With its ancient commentaries the canon fills several library shelves, and its size reflects its meticulous detail. From the finest points of meditative introspection, through the organization of a monastery, down to how to drink water (sitting, quietly) the rules are clear. And at Madunāgala, and even more at other hermitages, it is possible to witness these ancient rules largely in force today.

[2] Heinz Bechert recently announced, and will soon publish, his conclusion that the date of the Buddha is not nearly so certain as it has hitherto been assumed to be, and that it might solve some problems if it were brought down about a century.

Furthermore, as Richard Gombrich[3] has shown, contemporary doctrines and ceremony are very similar to those found in the canon. Buddhism in Ceylon is Theravāda, the School of the Elders, and Sinhalese Buddhists have good reason to vaunt the conservatism the name implies. Such long-lived uniformity has enabled the Orientalist Heinz Bechert to treat the issue of Theravāda's relation to the state throughout history quite comprehensively in only three volumes.[4] And the great consciousness of their own history entailed in the Buddhists' orthodoxy has enticed the anthropologist, S. J. Tambiah, to treat the same issue in one massive volume.[5] Indeed it even seems possible that a study of contemporary monks, under these circumstances, might be used to illuminate the ancient history of the order.[6]

Yet, as I have pointed out, there are marked differences between groups claiming to represent ancient orthodoxy and orthopraxy. As most of the rest of the book is devoted to explaining why this is the case, I shall only outline the answer here. Social, political, and economic circumstances are different today, and these do affect even those most withdrawn from the world. And, indeed, there is some failure to follow the letter and the spirit of the scriptures on account of conflicting circumstances, or even simple ignorance. Despite these factors, however, most monks in this study do eventually seem to have had considerable success in achieving the way of life they set out to achieve.

And that is the key to the matter, for in fact they set out to achieve quite different aims. The ideal was itself complex, composed of different and to an extent contradictory models which

[3] Richard Gombrich, *Precept and Practice*, Oxford University Press (Oxford, 1971).

[4] Heinz Bechert, *Buddhismus, Staat, und Gesellschaft in den Ländern des Theravāda Buddhismus*, Band XVII, 1–3, Schriften des Instituts für Asienkunde (Hamburg, 1966, 1967, 1973).

[5] S. J. Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge, 1976). On this see also my review article in *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford*, Vol. VIII, No. 2; and Gananath Obeyesekere, 'Religion and Polity in Theravada Buddhism: Continuity and Change in a Great Tradition', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 21, No. 4, 1979, pp. 626–39; and the correspondence columns of *Man*, Vol. 15, No. 2, June 1980.

[6] I have outlined the consequences of this approach in 'The Social Organization of the Singhalese Sangha in an Historical Perspective', in *Contributions to South Asian Studies*, Vol. I, ed. Gopal Krishna, Oxford University Press (New Delhi, 1979).

had been laid one on top of the other in the course of Buddhism's history, most of them so long ago that the changes may reasonably be regarded as ancient. Even a central term, such as Sangha, the Order of Monks, gradually extended its meaning in the course of these changes. Yet the new meanings are by no means clearly distinguished from the old in the monks' texts, and few reformers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were either inclined or equipped to split such hairs. Hence monks who claimed to espouse the same ideal, original monastic practice, were in fact beginning from quite different assumptions and in the end doing quite different things.

The proposition might therefore be rephrased thus: the monks do invariably base themselves on orthodox models, and these models are indeed ancient, but they are by no means unitary. In anthropological terms I would say that the monks' mythic charter is not a single, static, as it were two-dimensional tableau of values and precepts. If, under the circumstances, we are to speak of a charter at all, we must see it as embodying change and ambiguity, as a body of legend and rule whose own history must be explained before it is used to explain present events. (And I wonder how often the same might be said of charter myths studied by other anthropologists.)

The next two hypotheses promise to discover an underlying pattern by no means obvious from surface appearances: they treat the forest movement and the institution of renunciation as particular instances of broader patterns in human affairs. The first was tentatively put forward by Nur Yalman when he wrote: '. . . those societies which are highly and rigidly stratified appear to accord greater prestige to asceticism and other-worldliness in their religious ideology . . .'[7] And elsewhere in the same article he suggests what the causal relationship might be by referring to the ascetic movement as a 'safety valve' to allow individuals to escape the oppressions of caste society. He does recognize the difficulties of such a speculation, however, and nowhere states this thesis in a strong form. I shall take matters into my own hands—absolving him of further responsibility—and propose this: renunciation is an institution created in a stratified society to allow individuals to escape

[7] N. Yalman, 'The Ascetic Buddhist Monks of Ceylon', *Ethnology*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1962, p. 324.

social oppression. (This is somewhat different from Yalman's version, which mentions 'craving for status', rather than craving for freedom from low status, as a motive.)

There is no doubt that this hypothesis is at odds with the Theravāda tradition. In the traditional explanation individuals leave the world because of *dukkha*, and *dukkha* may be explained as old age, sickness, or death; or sorrow, lamentation, sadness, and so forth. In this respect *dukkha* may be best translated as 'suffering'. The word's semantic field also includes, however, an altogether subtler meaning which might be translated as 'discomfort'. Francis Story has glossed this vividly as including, among others, uncertainty, disturbance, worry, and anxiety; and as a series of paired states, such as desire/frustration, deprivation/excess, excitement/boredom, striving/repression.[8] In a kind of shorthand forest monks today frequently say that they took the robes because of 'disillusionment with the world' (*sasara kaḷakirīma*). When pressed more closely they may enumerate a number of factors: family catastrophe, quarrelling in the family, poverty, inability to find a job. They may also mention a general malaise rather nearer discomfort than suffering. And in nearly the same breath they may likewise cite positive reasons, such as an attraction to the forest life, desire to meditate, or an inclination from childhood to become a monk. These too are traditional. So if it could be shown that in reality the depredations of the caste or class system were behind it all, we should have made a notable discovery.

The most definitive way of testing this hypothesis would be to go directly to the period in which the institution of renunciation arose. An exhaustive treatment would be too lengthy, but I can mention that we are likely to get little satisfaction from such an investigation for want of information; and what we would learn argues for quite a different hypothesis. The institution of renunciation arose in India some time prior to 500 B.C., before the rise of Buddhism and Jainism as we know them. Though a very great deal has been written on the origin of these religions, on the institutions of the mendicant *śramaṇa* (striver) and *parivrājaka* (wanderer) in general, and on brahmanical renouncers (*sannyāsin*), we do not really know what milieu gave rise to them, at what period they began, or even the intellectual

[8] *Suffering, Collected Essays*, Buddhist Publication Society (Kandy, 1973), p. 3.

tradition that most properly owns them.[9] Nor are we in a position to tell whether that society was 'stratified' (assuming we knew what that would mean in the context), or even whether the institution of caste was yet present.[10]

What can be assumed with some certainty is that the doctrines associated with renunciation were held among the privileged, the warrior estate (*kṣatriya*), rather than among the lowly; and that the later doctrine of Buddhism (and other sects) in no way rejects or attempts to reorder the world of social hierarchy, but merely renders it relative to an overarching moral order. 'Among those who trust [merely] in lineage, the warrior estate is best; but best among gods and men is he of wise conduct' (D. XXVII. 32). In other words, this conception of the moral order is headed by the wise, who are wise by virtue of their understanding and mastery of *dukkha*, a universal condition. Buddhist renunciation, then, is not an attempt to deal with the ills of hierarchy alone, but is, rather, a proposed solution to the fundamental source of *all* ills.

Furthermore, the description of *dukkha*, in both its breadth and intimacy, is applicable to everyone, and this is revolutionary. For—I shall speak now of the period in which Buddhism itself arose—it proposes a universal view of the human condition (*dukkha*) and a universally available remedy (renouncing the world) against the background of a society composed of different races and tongues, different political systems, and different estates. Outside the circle of renouncers there had apparently been no coherently formulated idea which served to draw this diversity together in thought. True, there was the old theory of different estates (*varṇadharma*), which held that humanity is divided into fundamentally different kinds from birth according to their function in society; yet for all the still-living power of this concept it did not even then adequately explain all the evident variety of human life. We, the inheritors

[9] For suggestions and further reading see Patrick Olivelle, *The Origin and the Early Development of Buddhist Monachism*, M. D. Gunasena and Co. (Colombo, 1974), and L. Dumont, 'Renunciation in Indian Religions', in *Religion, Politics, and History in India*, Mouton (The Hague, 1970).

[10] A society with kings is not necessarily stratified. Compare the data for pre-Buddhist India in Wilhelm Rau, *Staat und Gesellschaft im Alten Indien*, Harrassowitz (Wiesbaden, 1957), with M. Fried on rank and stratification in *The Evolution of Political Societies*, Random House (New York, 1967).

of Christian and Enlightenment ideas about the spiritual or natural equality of humans, are likely to miss the tremendous synthesizing impact of those new teachings which addressed themselves, so far as we can see for the first time, to universally shared human characteristics, such as suffering and the ability to escape suffering.

It is possible to speak, therefore, of a special relationship between the institution of renunciation and the institutions of a nascent caste society. But that relationship is neither a simple, causal one, nor is it oppressive stratification which is at issue. Rather, what was important about the society of the Buddha's time was its complexity and increasing differentiation, which made it possible for thinkers such as the Buddha to discover or invent a common human condition which underlay that complexity, embracing all races and estates, rendering simplicity out of confusion. And under such circumstances such a teaching would have had a credibility it could not have enjoyed in a more insular and less diverse social realm. The relatively cosmopolitan society of ancient India did not simply cause renunciation to be instituted, nor did it determine the content of the Buddha's message, but it did provide conditions in which thought about human affairs could move toward a universalizing consummation. It is quite conceivable that an individual could have comprehended his idiosyncratic distress at low status within such thought, under the rubric of *dukkha*, but there is no reason to imagine that this was a dominant kind of suffering, more significant than all the others.

But what of modern forest monks? Here is a movement which is much more accessible to detailed investigation: of the approximately 150 hermitages, with more than 600 monks, now in Ceylon, all but a very small handful have appeared since 1950. We can therefore come very close to the movement's origins. Does it represent the reaction of people escaping the traumas of stratification? To this I should have to answer a qualified 'no'. True, it was a feature of some ascetics' reforms (see Chapters 8 and 10) that people of relatively low caste, in addition to those of high caste, were to be ordained; but that was not a major concern, and it was a conscious revival of the Buddha's universalizing message. Other movements (see Chapter 7) drew a great deal of support from the underprivileged,

and probably had more low-caste membership than either the ordinary Sangha or the rest of the ascetic groups. But even here the founder was high caste, like many of his disciples, and there was no recognition that renunciation was aimed at social mobility. In general the founders of these movements in the twentieth century were, like the Buddha before them, relatively well-educated, relatively well-to-do and highly placed members of society, speaking of the most general human condition.

There are important lessons to be drawn from these conclusions, but before I address them let us consider the third hypothesis. It still seems possible that the general heading of *dukkha* might conceal significant patterns and that these patterns might affect the nature of renunciation or of the Sangha. The next hypothesis, that the hermitage movement of the 1950s was the result of economic difficulties—unemployment, underemployment, and poverty—might be read as suggesting that the Sangha is another kind of 'safety valve', one for victims of general economic disorders; and that the movement would not have arisen at all without the economic disorders.

How are we to judge this? Let us for a moment assume that economic difficulties were not present. Would the revival have taken place? There is every reason to think it would have. At the time there was a mood of religious fervour in the country, brought about by the coincidence of national independence in 1948 and the two thousand five hundredth anniversary of the Buddha in 1956–7. The leaders of the hermitage movement, as we shall see, both contributed to this general enthusiasm and reaped its benefits. Eager recruits came forward from all over the island, and the most exclusive groups turned away those they did not find qualified.

But, it might further be asked, were these recruits not perhaps driven by unemployment or underemployment? Of the monks who were ordained at the time some did indeed speak of unemployment or poverty as a motive among other motives, and this quite reasonably reflected the growing economic difficulties of the island, which was already experiencing population pressure and the difficulties of a stagnant agrarian economy. Certainly there were monks recruited later, in the 1960s, who could ordinarily have expected a successful worldly career but who had been thwarted by a yet worse economic situation. But in

neither group did more than a handful rate such reasons as very important, nor did they give them primacy over other motives, such as a childhood desire to become a monk, family difficulties, or a more general dissatisfaction with lay life. Nor is it very credible that someone would become a forest monk for purely economic reasons: the life is too difficult.

Indeed, it is possible to go further and suggest that whatever consequences modern economic difficulties in Ceylon might have had, these did not bear very greatly on the hermitage movement. It is more likely that economic changes had quite a different result: Richard Gombrich and Gananath Obeyesekere are about to chronicle, in a forthcoming book, some modern movements in Sinhalese religion which had their roots in this period, which are attributable in large measure to economic problems, but which have nothing to do with the hermitage movement. (They are in fact untraditional cults of ecstatic religion, very far indeed from the traditional and sober ideals of the forest life.) The most that can be said is that some individuals came to the forest out of motives among which economic deprivation was important.

Before I go on to the next thesis let me address myself to some more general conclusions which can be drawn from the discussion of these last two theses. I have rejected them, and I would reject similar ones, because of the very nature of what is being studied. For Buddhist renunciation is what might be called 'densely traditional'. By 'traditional' I do not mean merely that it bears the irresistible authority of great and ponderous age, but that it has a history:[11] it is an intellectual and cultural heritage within which questions of profound import have been asked and answered, new problems posed, and the form of further solutions determined. A Sinhalese cannot do just anything and call it renunciation, nor are we free to propose just any interpretation. This is part of what I mean by *densely* traditional.[12] While many actions and interpretations have been chosen by the tradition, others have been, as it were, crowded

[11] This history is outlined in Carrithers, 'Sons of the Buddha in Ceylon', in *The World of Buddhism*, eds. H. Bechert and R. Gombrich, Thames and Hudson, in press.

[12] This suggests the 'thick description' of Geertz. See his *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Hutchinson and Co. (London, 1975), pp. 3–32.

out, or forced to take their place under headings already given. Thus social and economic deprivation are already provided for, under the heading of *dukkha*. And indeed, as I argue later, the modern hermitage movement may be regarded—and was so regarded by the forest monks—as an example of a recurring theme in Buddhist history, the reform of an increasingly worldly, that is, a *decayed* Sangha. It is not, of course, the tradition that makes the Sangha decay, but it does determine that social and economic changes in the Sangha are interpreted as decay, and that revival takes the form it does.

The tradition is also dense in the sense that it is composed of many layers of interpretation: it is polysemous, composed of many meanings. And since renunciation is an institution conceived about and for individuals, a good deal of polysemy lies in the tradition's complex conception of individual motives and individual actions. On the one hand, there are negative motives and actions: constitutive of renunciation—that without which it would be unrecognizable—is the leaving of the family and domestic life; and this is true for all Indian religions and all contemporary Buddhist renouncers in Ceylon.[13] An historical development from this was the peculiarly Buddhist explanation of renunciation, that one leaves home to put an end to *dukkha* in its Buddhist significance; and this is why, whether one asks a Sinhalese or a Chinese monk, he will reply that he left because of 'disillusionment with the world',[14] the source of *dukkha*.

But on the other hand there are positive motives. This leaving of the world in its ancient Indian conception was not merely an escape from a wretched existence, but also a glorious acceptance of the arduous but worthy and pre-eminent path to wisdom. And after Buddhism came to Ceylon this positive aspect was further elaborated: the Sinhalese monk joins an august corporation of tremendous antiquity, the Sangha, who preserve the central values of Sinhalese life. In this perspective he embraces a fate noble, heroic, and full of fruitful struggle. And the Sangha, far from being despised mendicants at the periphery of social life, are honoured figures at the centre. Furthermore, those who,

[13] See Patrick Olivelle, 'A Definition of World Renunciation', *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens*, Vol. XIX, 1975, pp. 76–83.

[14] See Holmes Welch, *The Practice of Chinese Buddhism, 1900–1950*, Harvard University Press (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), p. 260.

in modern times as in ancient, join the forest monks (rather than a more usual group) also reject the comfortable and all-too-worldly life of the village priest and exemplify in their persons a reform of the Sangha as a whole, a return to ancient splendour.

Indeed, if we are to seek a single socially effective cause, which would underlie a single dominant motive among the welter of motives through which renunciation is initiated, it would be this, that to become a forest monk is a heroic and laudable choice, a destiny that appeals to romance and high hopes rather than to misery and desperation to escape. Furthermore, it is a motive which is hidden, though hidden rather on the purloined-letter principle by being implicit and pervasive. Even more than the canonical literature, Sinhalese literature is completely suffused with the light of this gentle courage of renunciation, the highest possible virtue. But aspirations to this virtue are assumed, not stated outright, in the self-descriptions of the forest monks. In my discussions with the monks in which I attempted to tease out an underlying pattern to their motives, I found, on the one hand, that their standard and orthodox answer was that they left the world because of disillusionment. And I was sometimes able to elicit a circumstantial account of one or more personal sorrows which brought disillusionment upon them. But at the same time, they would nearly always admit to a childhood fascination with the robes, perhaps, or to having seen or heard a forest monk, an experience which motivated them to renounce. The negative reasons were interesting and significant, though more as a comment on the difficulties of human and Sinhalese life in general, and it was impossible to construe any very clear or simple pattern among them. But what was in a sense too important or obvious for comment, or even for easy comprehension, was the single theme which wove together the positive motives: the traditionally transmitted aspiration to the estate of the venerable forest dweller. It is to the delineation of this aspiration that this book is largely devoted.

I turn now to the fourth hypothesis. Like the two preceding ones it offers an explanation of Sinhalese Buddhist renunciation which would reveal an underlying cause unrecognized by the Sinhalese, and I would reject it for many of the reasons which led me to reject those. But it nevertheless points to a significant

and interesting pattern. Nur Yalman put it in these words: '. . . some individuals who find it difficult to lead and organize their lives may well [seek to escape the world]'.[15] In the context —and also in personal communication—he implied that, if this is so, then there might be some correlation between renunciation and certain stresses built into Sinhalese culture which are felt by individuals. I will take the matter into my own hands again, and propose a sufficiently strong version of this to be worth testing: renunciation is the consequence of psychological stress imposed by certain inherent disharmonies in Sinhalese culture.

Let me consider this in the light of the small sample of nine monks about whom enough information is given in this book for the reader to form an independent judgement.[16] Of these, three[17] cannot possibly be considered inadequate or to be victims of stress. They are mentally robust, highly intelligent, and hardy individuals who would not only have been successful but very influential in any field they chose. Their taste for the hermitage life, though certainly conditioned by a keen and cultivated sense of *dukkha*, originates rather more in their attraction to the forest life as a noble vocation. These monks traced their vocation to childhood, and their accomplishments as monks and as leaders must be considered the fruit of healthy maturation within the values of Buddhist culture.

At the other extreme, one of the monks has been regarded (by other observers) as more or less mentally imbalanced,[18] and he is in many ways an anomaly. He failed to complete his training as a conventional forest monk, and became the focus—rather than the leader—of a very short-lived but vigorous movement of ascetics rather outside the traditional fold. For lack of intimate information it is difficult to identify the origins or nature of his personality, though certainly hell-fire held its fascination for him. I suspect that he might best be classed as a particularly energetic member of that small group of forest monks who find solitary life the only possibility. These are not numerous, for two

[15] Nur Yalman, op. cit., p. 323.

[16] Nyanatiloka, Paññānanda, Subodhānanda, Tāpasa Himi, Ratanapāla, Guṇānanda, Jinavaṃsa, Ñāṇānanda and Ānandasiri.

[17] Ānandasiri, Jinavaṃsa, and Nyanatiloka.

[18] Tāpasa Himi.

reasons. First, the life is both physically and mentally difficult, and those who truly cannot organize themselves, or who are seriously disordered, soon fall away. Second, those who cannot maintain a certain level of acceptable behaviour have a great deal of pressure put on them, by both laymen and monks, to conform or quit the robes. The forest life is not a haven for the very deeply flawed.

Indeed, I will venture the generalization that, for the rank and file of forest monks, represented by one in the sample,[19] their motives are evenly balanced between a positive attraction to the life and negative afflictions, whether psychological, economic, or social. To this extent, therefore, the thesis that renunciation is a reaction to stress—either culturally induced or idiosyncratic—is no more true than either of the other bald hypotheses I have proposed. It may be true for some individuals, but it explains neither renunciation in general nor the recent forest movement.

But there is more to it than that. Four of the monks[20] are clearly under the influence of a complex of cultural values which, while regarded as fundamental to the human condition by Sinhalese Buddhists, take a good deal of explaining to the modern West. I have argued this in detail elsewhere,[21] and will merely describe it briefly here. In the canonical literature, folklore, habitual social arrangements, and child-rearing practices of the Buddhist Sinhalese are enshrined a constellation of values and images which include physical cleanliness, moral purity, and legitimate authority (political, religious, or familial). These are given force by their opposition to another constellation, which includes bodily filth, sin, low status, and—this is the real point of it—the torments of hell, with flames, razor-sharp cutting edges, and oceans of excrement. The consequences of seeing the world in this way were quite different for each of the four monks, but the fear of hell both motivated them and was used by them to explain themselves and motivate others. This is the dark shadow created by the golden light shed on renuncia-

[19] Guṇānanda.

[20] Paññānanda, Ratanapāla, Ñāṇānanda, and probably Subodhānanda.

[21] 'Hell-fire and Urinal Stones: an Essay on Buddhist Purity and Authority', in *Contributions to South Asian Studies*, Vol. II, ed. Gopal Krishna, Oxford University Press (New Delhi, 1982).

tion by the Sinhalese tradition, and in a modern perspective it might be regarded as a regrettable and tyrannical consequence thereof. It would, however, be odious to regard this as a sort of disease of Sinhalese culture (or of traditional cultures), not least because it is but one answer to a phalanx of problems of discipline, education, and social ordering which have nowhere else been conclusively solved. In any case it is clear that any ideal so clear and one-sided as that of the moral purity associated with renunciation must entail the converse, moral filth and hell-fire.

The fifth hypothesis is rather different from the first four, which have proved to have some limited truth when adapted to the context. It is founded on two pieces of information. The first is simply that meditation is quite naturally the special concern of the forest monks, as befits their religious virtuosity. The second is that the present-day hermitages are really the work of a handful of monks, most of whom are studied in this book. I therefore proposed the hypothesis that the founding of the hermitages was informed by the monks' experience in meditation. It is because of this speculation that I assumed that it would not only be fruitful, but necessary, to study the internal, religious psychological facet of the movement as well as its social history.

It was indeed a fruitful speculation; but it was totally wrong. It rests upon the notion of the primacy of religious experiences, preferably spectacular ones, as the origin and legitimation of religious action. But this presupposition has a natural home, not in Buddhism, but in Christian and especially Protestant Christian movements, which prescribe a radical conversion experience as the basis of Church membership. The notion of experiences, and internal experience, then became the touchstone of both religious psychology, *pace* William James, and of many later religious movements, such as the psychedelic movement of the 1960s. It likewise influenced the Western understanding of Buddhist meditation: Philip Kapleau's *Three Pillars of Zen*,[22] the first really circumstantial account of Buddhist meditation experience in English, recounts a number of experiences undergone by Zen meditators, experiences which were both spectacular and, as it seemed, radically transforming.

The central tradition of Theravāda, however—and here I

[22] John Weatherhill, Inc. (Tokyo, 1965).

speak for most of the monks I worked with as well—considers spectacular experience as an obstacle to practice, because of the great emotional disturbance involved. Indeed, a closer study of the Zen tradition[23] reveals that the same is true there. There is a profound unity in Buddhism over this question, for the objective of meditation in all Buddhist traditions is the cultivation of wisdom (*paññā*) founded in tranquillity and equanimity (*passaddhi* and *upekkhā*).

Yet it is not this consideration which renders meditation experience irrelevant to the founding of hermitages, but quite another, which is contained in a list widely used by the monks in preaching and writing. The list is this: *dāna, sīla, bhāvanā*, that is, generosity, morality, and meditation. The significance of the list is that it describes the hierarchy of religious practices, beginning with the lowest and proceeding to the highest meditation. Generosity is a virtue particularly reserved for laymen, and practised especially by supporting the monks materially. With the merit or, in a more psychological sense, the wholesomeness of mind achieved through this elementary practice, one is then able, in this life or another, to progress to morality, initially by restraining oneself from killing, stealing, lying, improper sexual behaviour, and intoxication.[24] But morality admits of grades, and the highest level is that of the fully ordained monk, who observes all the 227 rules of the monastic code, the Vinaya. Only from this height of moral discipline is one able to go on to meditation. Proper monastic life is therefore founded on morality, and indeed not only did the founders of the hermitage cite *sīla*, morality, as their prime purpose, but few of them had had any experience of meditation before they went to the forest.

For the present I will illustrate this merely by summarizing a number of discussions I had with various monks, which revealed the axiomatically fundamental place they give to *sīla*. I proposed, as a contrast to the doctrinal position, that the list should be reversed, and the path should begin with meditation and end in generosity. That is, after first meditating, one would realize the significance of living a moral life by the Buddhist

[23] See Trevor Leggett, *The Tiger's Cave*, Routledge and Kegan Paul (London, 1964), *passim*.

[24] These are the basic five precepts taken by Buddhist laymen on ceremonial occasions, that is, quite frequently.

precepts; and such a moral life could in turn be the foundation of generous and compassionate activity in the world. In fact the difference between the orthodox Theravāda view and this heterodox proposal reflects the difference between Buddhism as the indigenous religion of Ceylon, and Buddhism as a spiritual movement in the West. In the West, a few individuals (most of them relatively well-educated and intellectual) have come to it out of personal interest, and its particular attraction lies in the promise of release through self-cultivation. But it is difficult for Westerners steeped in ideas of Christian charity or social relevance to stop there, and it is commonly expected that self-cultivation will be the medium for a transformation which will further render the meditator morally fit and compassionate.

There are many doctrinal reasons for rejecting my conjecture, but the impatience and even outrage with which the monks heard it, and the unity of view with which it was rejected, left no doubt that the monks place moral purity in the central position I had wished to accord to meditative experience. I was, in effect, attacking the very ground of their way of life. *Sīla* is so immanent and important that it is regarded, in a chain of images so common that their metaphorical nature is wholly obscured, as palpable and substantial: as the canon has it, the good monk's *sīla* is 'beloved of the noble, unbroken, uncut, unspotted, untarnished, productive of freedom, praised by the wise, unbesmirched by desire, and conducive to meditative concentration'. (D. XVI. II. 9.) It is the basic emotional referent of the forest life.

Specific to Buddhism though this conception of *sīla* is, I believe that it contains the germ of a provisional transcultural explanation of monastic life in general. I do not make any great claims for this explanation: ultimately it rests only on the aptness of a description of Christian monastic life by William James which, word for word, could be applied to Buddhist monastic life. It does however record an aspect of the monastic personality which seems to me in retrospect to pervade the life of the monks I knew in Ceylon, whether Sinhalese or European; and I have since witnessed it in monks of other traditions as well.

Let me begin by pointing out that one of the fruits of the

acquisition, over the past few centuries, of a great deal of knowledge about other cultures and religions has been an increasing abstraction and generality in our thought about the systems by which men order their lives. We can now be thought of as symbol makers, users of language: we, unlike the animals, have culture. In a material perspective these capacities enable us to seize the world and ourselves and manipulate them for certain limited ends. In a mental perspective they enable us to interpose some defence of a philosophical, ritual, or social nature between ourselves and the inexorable processes of change and dissolution in nature, in society, and in our bodies. Or they enable us to grasp the elusive: experience. Lévi-Strauss has been at great pains to construe the fundamental nature of such systems on a linguistic analogy, as composed of binary oppositions. And Mary Douglas and Louis Dumont, in their different ways, have shown that perhaps the master opposition in these systems of thought and action is that between purity and pollution. To simplify Douglas: the pure is that which falls within ordered categories, while the impure is that which cannot be so subsumed. We might in fact conclude that in so far as we have an innate capacity for ordering experience, we want, indeed we need, to use it. We have an appetite for order; for, as it were, purity. This is not our only appetite, but it is one capable of both fulfilment and endless frustration.

I suggest, therefore, that monastic institutions are, among other things, monuments to this appetite, and that those who create and join them are especially sensitive to its demands, or to put it differently, to the need for purity. The actual origins of monasticism are, of course, wrapped in mystery, but it must everywhere have entailed processes of questioning and innovation around the idea of a simplified life, such as those documented in this book. Indeed, if we are to follow Dumont, renunciation and monasticism were invented but once, in ancient India, and spread from there.[25]

But however that might be, there is a striking homogeneity among monks. William James, in speaking of Christian saints, describes a quality he calls the 'Purity of Life', which could apply equally well to the Buddhist forest monks:

[25] Louis Dumont, 'On the Comparative Understanding of Non-Modern Civilizations', *Daedalus*, Spring, 1975, pp. 166–9. And personal communication.

> When the craving for moral consistency and purity is developed to this degree, the subject may well find the outer world too full of shocks to dwell in, and can unify his life and keep his soul unspotted only by withdrawing from it. That law which impels the artist to achieve harmony in his composition by simply dropping out whatever jars . . . rules also in the spiritual life . . . . So monasteries and communities of sympathetic devotees open their doors, and in their changeless order, characterized by omissions quite as much as constituted of actions, the holy-minded person finds that inner smoothness and cleanness which it is torture to him to feel violated at every turn by the discordancy and brutality of secular existence.[26]

I shall briefly illustrate the appropriateness of this description to Buddhist monastic life. Throughout the canon the monk's life is described in metaphors of purity (for example, it is *parisuddha*, completely pure), and this purity is explicitly connected with moral purity, *sīla*. And of course the great compendium of meditation composed in Ceylon in the fifth century A.D., the *Visuddhimagga*, addresses itself to those entering on the meditative life as 'those desirous of purity' (*visuddhikāmā*). For Sinhalese Buddhists, as I have indicated, this moral purity is a sufficient explanation in itself, a value of such power and pervasiveness in Sinhalese culture that it requires no further explanation.

Western monks in Ceylon, on the other hand, find it necessary to translate this into a more familiar idiom, both to understand it themselves and to convey it to other Westerners. Their views have in common a concern with the relative absence of moral clarity, the 'discordancy', of life. The English monk Ñāṇamoli wrote that the Buddhist teaching 'provides an unfailing standard of value, unique in its simplicity, its completeness, and its ethical purity, by means of which any situation can be assessed and a profitable choice made'.[27] An American monk spoke to me of the 'restfulness' of the monastic discipline: he no longer had to choose between difficult and potentially inconclusive alternatives in his behaviour. It is not difficult to relate this

[26] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William Collins and Sons (London, 1969), p. 292. One wonders whether James was not in fact deeply influenced by Buddhism, perhaps through the Orientalist Henry Clarke Warren at Harvard.

[27] *Visuddhimagga* ('The Path of Purification'), tr. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, privately published (Colombo, 1964), pp. vii–viii.

'craving for moral consistency and purity' to the *anomie* of complex societies, either the modern West or—as is quite possible—ancient India.

Nor do the origins of the craving for purity go unexplained. In the canonical tradition it is intelligence: that handful of people 'capable of being enlightened' (*bodhaneyya*) apprehend the significance of *dukkha*, the disease, and recognize the fitness of the cure, renunciation. In this view renunciation is the height of moral purity, an estate unequivocally more exalted than any other.

Some Western monks in Ceylon have translated this doctrine into a view both more egalitarian and less insistent on its own superiority, able to accommodate itself to the morals and philosophies of the West.[28] The decision to renounce the world, in this opinion, is the consequence of 'sensitivity', a heightened awareness of the difficulties and frustrations of life not only in their grosser manifestations, such as disease and the death of loved ones, but in the subtler dissatisfaction with the round of secular life. This interpretation of *dukkha* as an altogether finer and ubiquitous lack of ease in fact corresponds closely to the most original part of the Buddha's teaching, and is therefore canonically well-founded.[29] The difference lies in the claim made for this sensitivity: one monk likened it to allergies, the possession of which confers no status. Another likened it to artistic ability, a fortunate accident of birth but not inherently more valuable than, say, athletic ability. I have begun to hear this view among Buddhists in the West, and I suspect that it is here to stay.

A good deal of this sensitivity is sensitivity to society; and it cannot be denied that there is something inherently misanthropic about keeping one's soul unspotted by withdrawing from the world. This is especially true of eremitical monasticism. Buddhist poetry is eloquent on the subject:

[28] I have no written sources for this. I discovered it in separate conversations with three monks, two Germans and an American. At first I thought it a marvellous coincidence that they shared the view, but now I can see that it must have been a topic of conversation among them.

[29] See Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, Gordon Fraser (Bedford, 1967). See also the article on *dukkha* in Rhys-Davids and W. Stede's *Pali–English Dictionary*, Pali Text Society (London, 1972).

If I were in another's company,
I'd have to endure prattle and scolding.
Predicting the danger before it occurs,
Like the one-horned rhinoceros, wander alone. (SN. 49.)

The English monk Ñāṇamoli expresses the sentiment thus: 'There are two reasons for disliking people [wanting to get away from their society]: because they behave objectionably, and because they make one behave objectionably oneself. The opposite holds good too. But there is no "behaviour" when one is alone.'[30] This is 'disillusionment with the world' with a vengeance.

Nor is it merely a matter of living in solitude, for the nature of the Sangha ensures that the monk experiences what society he does meet in a far simpler way. Within the Sangha monks are graded strictly according to age of ordination, and there are two forms of etiquette: one addressed to elder monks, another to younger. The relationship with laymen is radically simplified as well and the formal etiquette of such interaction takes the same form with everyone. The German monk Sumana interpreted the consequences of this simplification in his own terms:

At whatever period of a man's life, the urge in him for the ascetic life asserts itself, then along with the other bonds binding to the worldly life, the bonds of blood-relationship also lose their force. The mother has become an elder sister; the father has become a brother; the wife has become a sister; the son has become a brother . . . fellow beings, fellow sufferers.[31]

Though they, like other Buddhists, might accept this general sentiment, the Sinhalese would not express it in this manner: in Sinhalese society the obligations of kinship are as stern in their way among siblings as toward elders, and sibling relationships could not act as an embodiment of relaxed or egalitarian relations. But for Sumana, as for other monks, simplification is clearly a release.

But this is not only release *from* something; it is release *to* something. For, after all, the foundation of the life in moral

[30] Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, *A Thinker's Notebook*, The Forest Hermitage (Kandy, n.d.), p. 2.

[31] Sumana Samanera, *Going Forth—Pabbajja: A Call to Buddhist Monkhood*, Buddhist Publication Society (Kandy, 1961), p. 10.

purity has a purpose only in going on to the pleasures of meditation, 'that inner smoothness and cleanness'. The Buddhist scriptures praise the pleasures of meditation fulsomely, in many figures of speech. So does Sumana, in terms that suggest he is speaking from experience:

Gratifying results of [meditation] will become evident. Firstly, the calm and concentration of mind as effected by meditative training in solitude, can now be maintained for increasingly longer periods of time. Calm and concentration will gradually enter into the meditator's innermost being, and will also manifest themselves outwardly in his daily behaviour (in the family, in professional life and towards friends), by a calmer and more composed way of speaking . . . , and by calmer bodily movements . . . .[32]

Simplification, certainty, order, peace: Western Buddhist monks have been able to translate these qualities of Buddhist monastic life into an idiom familiar to them, and in so doing they make the life accessible to us. In the next chapter we will look at some of the specific roots in Western culture which enable these ideas to be translated, and to inspire Westerners; and these preliminaries will then allow us to see the specifically Sinhalese Buddhist culture of asceticism in clearer light.

[32] Ibid., p. 46.

CHAPTER 2

European Monks

Fair Quiet, have I found thee here,
And Innocence thy Sister dear!
Mistaken long, I sought you then
In Busie Companies of Men.
Your sacred Plants, if here below,
Only among the Plants will grow
Society is all but rude,
To this delicious Solitude.

Andrew Marvell, *The Garden*

The Island Hermitage lies on a low, wooded island in an inland lagoon on the south-west coast of Ceylon. It is really two islands: the one first settled by monks is a shady, park-like place, no more than a few hundred yards across in any direction. The second, about the same size, is connected to the first by a short causeway of bricks, earth, and mangroves. The whole lies about a mile across the salt water lagoon from the densely-populated coastal belt. At night the boom of surf reaches the island, and during the day, occasionally, the distant rumour of traffic on the coast road: both serve to emphasize the silence. The climate is hot and humid. There are mosquitoes.

The hermitage has fourteen *kuṭis*—monks' dwellings—spread about the island, each isolated from the others. These *kuṭis* set the tone for the Buddhist forest-dweller's life: each is one room, solitary and simple. The plainest have only a small porch, with a meditation walkway—a flat swept area perhaps twenty yards long and four feet wide—cleared in front. The more elaborate have a covered meditation walkway, roofed with tiles and surrounded by a low wall, so that the monks can pace back and forth even when it rains, which it does frequently. Nowadays the *kuṭis* are permanent structures, built of sun-dried bricks, concrete, plaster, and clay tiles, but this is the work of many years' improvement. For much of the history of the Island Hermitage,

monks lived in modest huts of palm branches or wattle and daub, with dirt floors.

The communal centre of the hermitage is the *dāna śālāva* (alms-hall) where the monks gather at different times during the day. The *dāna śālāva* is small, perhaps twenty feet by forty feet, and open to the air, with a half-wall below and an iron mesh above, to keep out the crows. The monks sit on long benches around the walls, before low tables. A long, spiral piece of iron hangs in the *dāna śālāva* to serve as a bell, rung to summon monks to breakfast, lunch, afternoon tea, or evening chanting—they do not take an evening meal. Attached to the hall is a pantry, where cups and dishes are kept, and beyond that a smoke-blackened kitchen, where laymen come to cook the monks' meals. The one or two lay servants who support them—by rowing back and forth to the mainland, cooking when no one else comes to do so, helping keep things in trim—are usually found near the kitchen.

The only other notable building on the island is the library-cum-chapter house (no very unusual arrangement), one square room with another square room on top of it, the latter reached by an outside stairway. The room below is the chapter house (Sinh. *poyagē*) in which the fully ordained monks recite the code of discipline every two weeks, and in which ordinations take place. The room above, the library, is lined with Pali texts in Sinhalese, Roman, Burmese, and Thai scripts; dictionaries; and a fine basic reference library in European languages (mostly German and English) on Theravāda Buddhism. Besides the bookcases, there are a table and chair in the library, which take up most of the space. Sitting at the table, one gazes through the open door out over the lagoon; through the side window is shrubbery, through the back window ironwood trees which, in season, mingle their blossom's fragrance with the perfume of the old books on the shelves.

Though the Island Hermitage was founded and largely occupied by European monks, its physical arrangements, and the practices and ideals of the monks, set it firmly in the tradition of Theravāda, and indeed Sinhalese, forest-dwelling life. There are three peculiar features which distinguish it from other hermitages. First, it is set on an island, whereas most Sinhalese hermitages are separated from the world by the forest, and by a

(largely symbolic) fence and gate set at the entrance to the hermitage. Second, most Sinhalese hermitages (but not all) have a building, sometimes the largest, devoted to a Buddha image. The Island Hermitage has only a fine two-foot bronze image in the *dāna śālāva*. This suggests the relatively smaller importance the Europeans lend to Buddhist piety, in which they were not trained from childhood (unlike the Sinhalese). Third, the library, though it has a smaller counterpart at most Sinhalese hermitages, is that of a working scholar. This is perhaps the most significant difference. Some of the Europeans have been productive scholars in their own right, translating and explicating the Pali canon and commentaries in European languages; and this solitary scholarly activity has betokened their relatively great isolation from their surroundings. Sinhalese forest-dwelling monks write as well, but they also preach and chant for the laity to a certain extent, and this very frequently compromises—or enriches—their anchoritic solitude.[1]

Nyanatiloka, who founded the Island Hermitage, spoke of it affectionately and justly as 'my island'. He was born and raised in Germany. Despite years of tribulation—he was twice interned by the British during the world wars—he lived a full meditative life while continuing his work of scholarship, which runs to thousands of pages of translations from the Pali. He is the only European monk to have founded a substantial hermitage, and the only one to have pupils following in his footsteps. I introduce this study with Nyanatiloka because, on the one hand, he stands equal to the Sinhalese monks as a representative of Theravāda monastic life; on the other, he comes to it from quite a different background and tradition, which evidently has in it, nevertheless, that which conduces to taking up the life.

In the following pages I translate, from the German, selected portions of an autobiographical sketch which Nyanatiloka wrote in his old age. (This was kindly lent me by his pupil, Nyanaponika.) I will provide commentary where necessary, and try to emphasize the particular features of one European tradition, the German Romantic, which influenced Nyanatiloka. In the discussion which follows, it will be seen that the European tradition might be thought of—and was thought of by Nyanatiloka—as culminating in Buddhist monasticism. It

[1] For this see Chapter 8.

will also be seen that there are differences between the European and the Buddhist traditions which illuminate both. Nyanatiloka's pious Roman Catholic mother took him to church frequently, and in his childish imagination he saw himself converting the savages. As we shall see in a later chapter, the Sinhalese monk Ratanapāla's parents often took him to the village temple, and he led the other children in mock religious processions. The central problem is to understand this positive side of renunciation, the culturally given aspiration to the monastic life.

From the beginning of Nyanatiloka's autobiographical sketch:[2]

I will thus attempt, very briefly, to give you a depiction of my outer and inner life. But the deepest in a human being can never be described. [Das Tiefinnerste eines Menschen laesst sich nie beschreiben.]

Born: 19/2/1878 in Wiesbaden. Name: Anton Walther Florus Gueth, son of the later director of the Municipal Senior School [staedtisches Realgymnasium], Alderman the Honourable Professor Anton Gueth. Mother: Paula, daughter of the Senator from Auffahrt zu Hersfeld in Kurhessen.

Our father was extremely strict but just, and had a very gentle and sensitive spirit, despite occasional violent spells. Among the four children I imagined myself to have understood him the best. He used to go on long walks in the evening in the lovely forest. Sometimes he was accompanied by Professor Schmidt, our very learned mathematics and physics professor, or by our family doctor Graeffe; but usually he was quite alone. If someone accompanied him he would often say after his return that one only loses inwardly by having company on such a walk.

Here Nyanatiloka's father expresses a central theme of nineteenth-century German thought. Society offers irritation and falsity, while Nature offers consolation. Thus Hölderlin's Hyperion laments: 'Ja, vergiss nur, dass es Menschen gibt, darbendes, angefochtenes, tausendfach geärgertes Herz! und kehre wieder dahin, wo du ausgingst, in die Arme der Natur, der wandellosen, stillen, und schönen.'[3] It is particularly im-

[2] I have italicized the portions from Nyanatiloka's text.

[3] 'Yes, only forget that there are men, starving, troubled, thousandfold angered heart! and return whence you came, into the arms of Nature, the unchanging, still, and beautiful.' Hölderlin, *Werke und Briefe*, Vol. 1, eds Friedrich Beissner and Jochen Schmidt, Insel Verlag (Frankfurt am Main, 1969), p. 296.

portant to realize that for many Germans, among them Nyanatiloka and his father, such literature stood beside, and often replaced, more traditional Christian literature, as a source of spiritual inspiration. Furthermore, the same glorification of Nature as against society is a more general heritage of the modern West: it is found in the English Romantics, as in the work of the Americans Henry David Thoreau and Robinson Jeffers.

Our mother, deeply loved by all of us, was gentle and passive and sometimes suffered considerably from the nervousness of our father.

My course of education in Europe was as follows:

1884–8 Middle school

1888–96 Royal Senior School [Kg. Realgymnasium]

1896–8 Private tuition in music; theory, composition, and continuation of my studies in violin, piano, viola, and clarinet.

1898–1900 Conservatory in Frankfurt; theory, composition, violin, piano.

1900–2 Conservatory in Paris.

My childhood and earliest school days were spent, by and large, happily and without illness. But even before I was ten years old the longing rose in me to devote myself entirely to the religious life, even to go to Africa to convert the savages, even to die the martyr's death. One dare not overlook the fact that I was raised a Roman Catholic. Only under the influence of a Catholic education by a priest could I have expressed such opinions as that whoever feels sorrow at the death of a close relative has no real belief—especially at the death of a small child, who is certain to go to heaven.

The strength of this religious conviction, for all that the object of the conviction would go through several changes, remained throughout Nyanatiloka's life.

From my earliest childhood on I had furthermore a great love for nature, as well as for solitude in the woods and for religious philosophical thinking. I was especially happy to lose myself in contemplation of the being of God, the vast night sky of stars, the brotherhood of all creatures, etc.

Compare Eichendorff's famous lines:

Waldeinsamkeit!
Du grünes Revier,
Wie liegt so weit
Die Welt von hier!
Schlaf nur, wie bald
Kommt der Abend schön,
Durch den stillen Wald

Die Quellen gehn,
Die Mutter Gottes wacht,
Mit ihrem Sternenkleid
Bedeckt sie dich sacht
In der Waldeinsamkeit,
Gute Nacht, gute Nacht!

Note, too, how easily Christianity blends with nature mysticism here.[4]

My whole striving went toward living as a hermit or monk. I therefore had a high respect for everything to do with monks, and I imagined how I would preach in the church about the evanescence and vanity of the world, and how all the listeners, convinced of the nothingness of everything earthly, would tear off all jewellery and decoration as they left the church. I had one hidden wish that I told no one, namely, that my oldest brother Armin, who was studying law at that time, would devote himself to the monk's life. And really, after some time, before he finished his studies, he decided to join the Capuchin order in nearby Mainz. Nevertheless he gave up his somewhat hasty plans after a while.

But I became ever more religious, though I discarded forever all external ceremonialism. I no longer kneeled in church, I no longer took holy water, I no longer crossed myself openly. Nor did I any longer beat my breast, saying 'mea culpa' etc. On the other hand I went to church every evening, when no one was there, and became absorbed in The Imitation of Christ *by Thomas à Kempis. The urge toward the solitude of the forest went before me like a red flag through my whole life. Today I live ever in the wooded seclusion of my island.*

I set my long-planned flight to the monastery in motion in 1897. After leaving behind a letter to my parents I took leave of my best friend Viktor Henn at the train station and travelled as far as Schalbach. From there I walked through the snow over Holzhauer Ems, Koblenz, to the lovely, lonely Maria-Lach, the famous Benedictine monastery. After knocking three times on the knocker of the door I waited with my heart beating until it was opened and they let me in. But I only stayed a short time in the monastery. I found that that sort of dependence and lack of freedom was not to my taste, and I returned shortly to my weeping parents.

Perhaps the greatest contrast between Christian and Buddhist monastic life lies precisely here. For the Christian monk, obedience is an autonomously important principle. His obedience to his superior reflects his obedience to God. In Buddhist monas-

[4] Forest solitude!/You green place/How far lies/The world from here!/Sleep, and soon/Comes the fair evening./Through the still woods/Go the springs,/Wakes the Mother of God/With her dress of stars/And covers you gently/In forest solitude./Good night, good night!

ticism, though a pupil is meant to obey his teacher, the object of training is to attain self-reliance and self-understanding.

Thereafter my original belief in a personal God turned more and more into a sort of pantheism. The atmosphere of Weltschmerz at the end of the last century had strengthened my own, and I began to flirt with sorrow. My musical compositions breathed this spirit as well.

It remains still to be noted that from about the age of fifteen I felt a well-nigh divine respect for great musicians, particularly composers. I thought of them as an expression of the highest and most sublime. Once, when I went with my mother to a concert given by a violinist, I was so gripped that I made the observation that whoever could play thus must be a noble person . . . . Thereafter I made many virtuosos my dearest friends by sheer persistence.

. . . My idea of love, quickened by religious enthusiasms, is exactly reflected in my composition to a poem by Hoffman von Fallersleben: 'I love you in God, and God in you; where you are, you are with me', etc. With great excitement I studied the red plush bound edition of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony that was marked with pencilled notes by Richard Wagner; it had been inherited by Felix Mottel from Wagner and then given to my friend Professor Gerhard.

It was about this time that a great love for philosophy woke in me. The first thing I read, sitting on a bench in the forest with one of my few friends, was Plato's 'Phaedo'. *Then followed Descartes,* The Critique of Pure Reason, *von Hartmann, etc. But above all I studied with extreme thoroughness the collected works of Schopenhauer in six volumes.*

These paragraphs summarize Nyanatiloka's character and thought immediately before his turn to Buddhism. First, his spiritual aspirations remain strong, and colour his vision of everything, including (perhaps physical) love. Even his love for music is subsumed under his spiritual and philosophical bent. Second, he retains his love for solitude, and the picture of him sitting in the forest with one of his 'few friends', reading philosophy, could as well apply to his life at the Island Hermitage. Third, his sensitivity to suffering, about which he is usually reticent, here finds some expression; though with the sobriety characteristic of his later life as a Buddhist monk, he recognizes the excesses of youth in his flirtation with Weltschmerz.

Most of this is explicit in the philosophy of Schopenhauer: the spiritual aspiration, the unsatisfactoriness of worldly existence, the sublime nature of music. Most significant is Schopenhauer's advocacy of asceticism and world-renunciation, expressed through his praise of the saint and the genius; but largely influenced as well by the thought of Indian Vedānta,

which, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, began to be discovered—and idolized—in Europe. Though Vedānta is philosophically quite different from Buddhism, they share the conviction that the answer to suffering (*dukkha*) lies in the forest-dwelling life. His reading of Schopenhauer must have focused Nyanatiloka's aspirations, and suggested that what he had not found in Christian monasticism, he would not find in music either. For Schopenhauer, music is the most sublime expression to which the worldly soul can aspire, but it does not reach the heights to which the saint attains. And this is connected with a vision of deep inwardness.

Nyanatiloka then goes on to mention his great taste for foreign lands, languages, and peoples, as well as his *Wanderlust*: he describes many walking tours he took up and down Germany. Though an adventurous spirit is not, I think, a requisite for a hermit monk, it is necessary for one who contemplates taking the robes seven thousand miles from home. He then continues:

From about my seventeenth year I renounced alcohol and smoking, which I recognized as being harmful to body, mind, and morals. I remained true to this principle in all circumstances, at home as well as at Maria-Lach where, aside from choice fish and meat, wine and beer were constantly set before me.

During my stay in Frankfurt, about the beginning of 1899, I became a vegetarian on ethical grounds. After a lecture in the vegetarian restaurant 'Ceres' given by the famous theosophical speaker Edwin Boehme, I became an enthusiastic follower of Buddhism, more by feeling than understanding. The next day I told my teacher Professor Bassermann about the lecture, whereupon for the next hour he praised the Buddhist Catechism *of Subhadra Bhikshu and likewise recommended the* Life and Effect of the Buddha, *translated by Pfungst. As he handed the* Catechism *over to me he said further that I should not go mad and join the Buddhist order. Bassermann himself was very enthusiastic about the Indian hermitage life. My goal was now clear before me, but I was not clear at all about what steps to take to realize it. It seemed to me that a journey to India was, from a financial viewpoint, totally impossible. Where could I come by the thousands I thought would be necessary?*

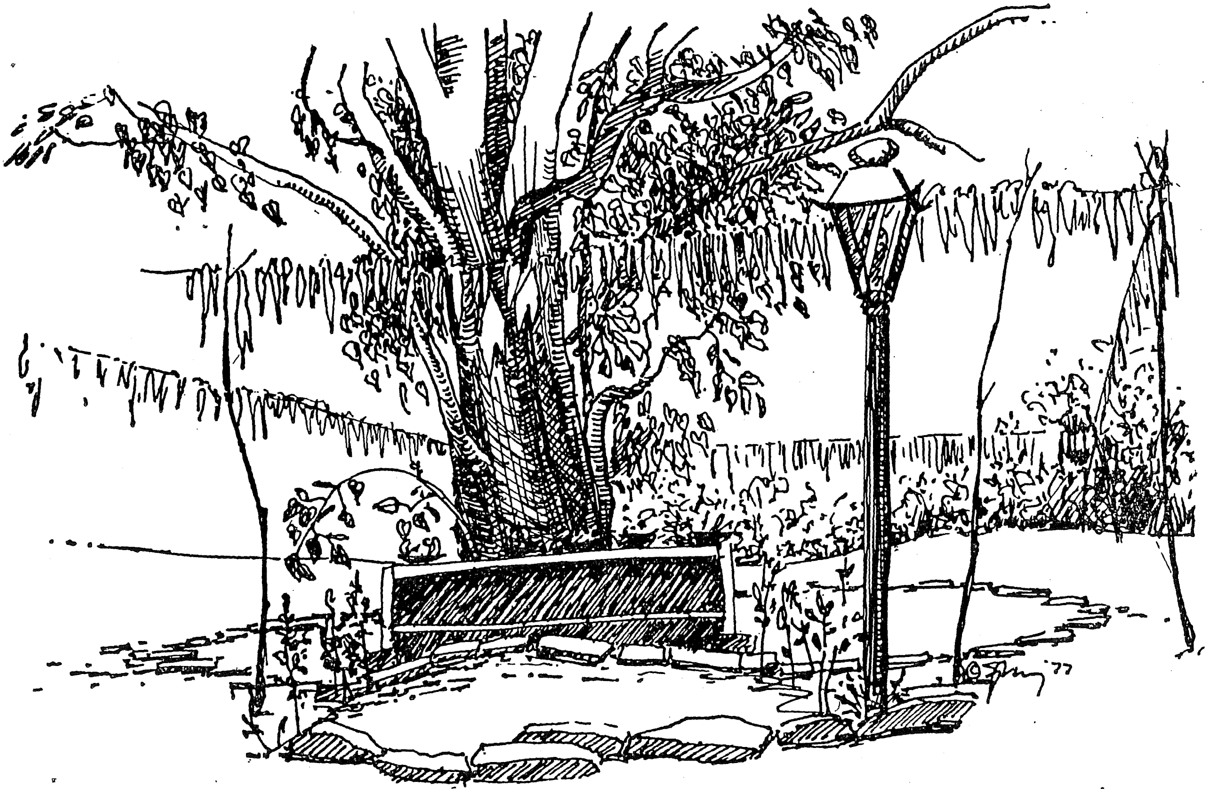
By this time the basic tenets of Buddhism were known in Europe and, through the offices of Oldenberg and Rhys-Davids, a number of accurate translations of Buddhist texts had been brought before the European public. The *Life and Effect of the Buddha* ('Buddha's Leben und Wirken') was not translated by

Pfungst, but by Theodor Schultze; it was a translation into German verse of Samuel Beal's English version[5] of the Chinese translation of the *Buddhacarita* of Aśvaghoṣa, a second century A.D. verse biography of the Buddha in Sanskrit. Though details of doctrine were probably obscured by this multiple translation, the basic legend, clear and simple, would not have been effaced. It is a story well known in all Buddhist societies, and is as inspiring to Sinhalese monks as it must have been to Nyanatiloka. (For the Sinhalese versions of the Buddha's life, see Gombrich, *Precept and Practice*, *passim*; and below, Chapter 5.)

The basic outline of the story is as follows. The Buddha was born, amidst miraculous signs, as the heir apparent to a king in India. Raised in the palace with all the comforts the world could provide, he was zealously protected by his father, who had received prophesies that, were he to witness suffering, he would renounce the world. Through the agency of the gods, the prince encountered an old man, a sick man, and a corpse, which brought home to him the inevitable lot of all mankind; and a religious mendicant, the sight of whom suggested a solution to his inevitable suffering. The prince left the palace to become a mendicant, leaving behind his young wife and their new-born child. He wandered among the world-renouncers of ancient India, mastering their doctrines, but nowhere found satisfaction. He undertook extreme self-mortification but found that of no use either. Finally he sat down under a tree and reflected deeply on suffering and its causes. The solution which he reached—his enlightenment—then became the basis of the message which he preached to the world for forty-five years.

The significance of this legend for Nyanatiloka lies not in its accuracy as a depiction of the Buddha's life (though in outline it is true to the spirit of his life), but as an evocation of all that Nyanatiloka had come to feel most deeply. Here was renunciation of the world; here was the hermitage life; and here was suffering and its solution. In fact, the actual details of the solution to suffering—Nirvana—were probably very poorly understood in Germany at that time (and it is not clear that they are much better understood now). Though I have not been able to

[5] Samuel Beal, *The Fo-sho-hing-tsang-king; or Buddhacarita, A Life of the Buddha*, Sacred Books of the East, Vol. 19 (Oxford, 1883). I have not been able to find a copy of *The Buddhist Catechism.*



A Bodhi tree. The tree beneath which the Buddha achieved enlightenment—a bō tree, *ficus religiosus*—is worshipped with flags and lamps. At Madunāgala.

find a copy of Schultze's work, I have found a biography of Schultze by Pfungst[6] (this was perhaps the origin of Nyanatiloka's confusion), from which it is obvious that Buddhism was not clearly differentiated from Vedānta. Vedānta, with its doctrine of the identity of the individual self (*ātman*) with the universal ground of reality (*brahman*), fitted very well with European, and particularly German, philosophies of the Absolute. There was therefore a tendency to find in Buddhism a metaphysical doctrine, whereas in fact the Buddha rejected metaphysics and cosmology from the outset, and emphasized the psychological and practical side of the spiritual life. All this was, however, irrelevant to the attraction that the Indian hermit life held for Nyaṇatiloka at the time.

He then writes of his work as a concert violinist and composer, his philosophically oriented musician friends—including a number of Rumanians—and a trip he made to North Africa. He continued to read philosophy with his Rumanian friends:

We read together the works of Tolstoy, Plato, etc., and also the book which, of all books, worked the deepest transforming influence on my life, The Dietetics of the Soul *by von Feuchtersleben. I recognized thereby that all mental suffering is conditioned by our twisted thinking, and it is therefore always great folly to be out of sorts or angry. The Buddha taught exactly the same when he said that, after total quenching of all personal wishes and desires, one finds release from all mental suffering.*

The Buddha taught that the source of (mental) suffering was *taṇhā*, thirst or craving, which produces continual desire, and that the path to release from this craving involves, first, a thorough moral discipline in which renunciation of the sensual is cultivated; and second, mental training in which the habit of craving is replaced by the habit of relinquishment.[7] Craving is treated as a disease; and indeed the four Noble Truths (*ariyasaccā*) which form the basis of the Buddha's teaching, are phrased after the fashion of an ancient Indian medical formula. The first Noble Truth is that the disease, suffering, is in fact present and universal. The second is that it has a distinguishable cause, craving. The third is that the disease is curable; while the fourth is the method of cure, the aforesaid training.

[6] Arthur Pfungst, *A German Buddhist*, tr. L. H. De Wilde, Luzac and Co. (London, 1902), 79 pp.

[7] See Chapters 3, 11, and 14.

Von Feuchtersleben was by no means a Buddhist; but much of what he wrote pointed in the same direction. He emphasized that much ill health results from improper application of the will. He quotes approvingly from Goethe: ' "I was unavoidably exposed to the contagion of putrid fever", says Goethe (whom we here cite, as in his case the strong impulse of professional duty was wanting, and the power of volition, therefore, the more strongly exemplified), "and I warded off the disease by a simple act of the will. The power of moral volition in such cases is incredible. It seems to pervade the whole body, and communicate a degree of energy which enables us to repel all injurious influences. Fear is a state of weakness during which we are easily conquered by an enemy." '[8]

Von Feuchtersleben aims chiefly at physical health, but in the course of his book, he summarized the same currents in nineteenth-century German thought which so deeply influenced Nyanatiloka. Indeed, its accuracy as a reflection of nineteenth-century German thought is expressed by its popularity: the translation I quote is from the thirty-second German edition, which was printed at least twenty years after it was first published.

Thus, he rejects society: 'We could not, even if we would, enjoy a state of existence perfectly free and pure; for an immense or universal net of falsehood, from which there is no escape, encompasses us on all sides—the falsehood of social intercourse, an external bondage which we cannot evade . . .'[9]

He glorifies Nature: 'If it be asked, "What can save us from the falsehood which lies around us?", we answer—The pleasure derived from the study of nature—the enjoyment and study of which furnish us with the ether that generates and feeds the best and deepest parts of our nature.'[10]

And he advises self-renunciation and introspection: 'What was [arbitrary] self-government in the will here becomes self-knowledge. Let us cultivate this side of our mental faculties by studying the genuine science of life, and thus learn to com-

[8] Ernst Freiherrn von Feuchtersleben, *The Dietetics of the Soul, or, True Mental Discipline*, tr. Col. H. A. Ouvry (London, 1873), pp. 21–2. The German title was *Zur Diätetik der Seele*, Gerold (Wien, 1838).

[9] Ibid., p. 155.

[10] Ibid., p. 159.

prehend by its fruits the divine character of knowledge, and of harmonious cultivation. The highest knowledge, by teaching us to incorporate the idea of the individual with that of the universe, leads us to religion, from which we derive that perfect self-renunciation which alone can impart the lasting cheerfulness necessary to produce health.'[11]

Most of this is vague—it is not at all clear what he meant by introspection, self-renunciation, religion, etc.—and with respect to self-discipline and introspection Buddhism goes far beyond von Feuchtersleben. Perhaps most significant is the assumption that von Feuchtersleben shares with the Buddhists, and which was clearly very much to Nyanatiloka's taste: that individual effort, in solitude, through the intellectual faculties, constitutes the effective spiritual life.

Nyanatiloka writes more about his musician friends, this time those he met while in Paris. But all the while he is intent on the East:

I was now constantly driven inwardly to realize the plan I had already formed in Frankfurt, to go to India and become a Buddhist monk there. As the first step towards realizing this plan I took an engagement as a violinist in Salonika, which was then still Turkish, in order to press on gradually to India. I was still under the impression that the journey would cost several thousands. Naturally my parents could know nothing of my real plans beforehand. In about May 1902, I parted tearfully from my Rumanian friends at the train station and travelled via Marseilles and Patras to Salonika.

Nyanatiloka played for nine months in Salonika, and then made his way south through the Levant towards the Indian Ocean, sleeping on deck with the disregard for physical comfort that characterized the rest of his life. He arrived in Bombay to discover that Buddhism had been extinct in India for about seven hundred years: if Europe knew this little about Buddhism, is it any wonder that European Buddhists entertained rather distorted ideas of Buddhist doctrine? He made his way to Ceylon, and then to Burma, where he became a full-fledged monk in 1904. He returned to Ceylon, and by 1911 had settled at the Island Hermitage. He was accepted—indeed, enthusiastically welcomed—as a monk by the Sinhalese, and the founding of the Island Hermitage followed a typical pattern: he heard

[11] Ibid., p. 171.

of the island, and went to see it with the help of his lay supporters, who then offered to build a hermitage for him there. Though the rest of his life was by no means settled, he managed to return to the island, whose physical beauty entranced him, and live there whenever he could. Both the 1930s and 1950s saw a small but active community of European and English-educated Sinhalese monks grow up around Nyanatiloka.

If we regard the most important origins of Nyanatiloka's Buddhist monastic calling as those which lie deepest in his childhood, there is no doubt that these are Christian; and that in their consequences for the formation of an aspiration they are similar to the roots of Buddhist aspiration. The question is, after all, not one of philosophy, but of homily, the unsubtle guidelines laid down by preachers for the edification of children and admonition of the wayward.

Buddhist and Christian homily share a stark moral dualism, the sharp division between good and evil, and in both religions this dualism supports a cosmology of heaven and hell, with the precarious human estate exposed between them. (True, the Buddhist heaven is not rated as high as the achievement of Nirvana in doctrine, but Nirvana is difficult to embroider: the sermons commonly preached to the uneducated rely far more heavily on the imagery of heaven and hell.) Both religions make much of the fair seeming but foul heart of earthly vanity. They both hold celibacy in special esteem, and in homily they make free use of the strenuous heroism of the saints to illustrate the point. Struggles are often internal in these stories, but they issue in unambiguously good consequences for those who undertake them, even though the consequences are postponed to another life. Whatever else may have fallen away, it is this moral heroism which runs continuously through Nyanatiloka's life.

It is not, however, only continuities that are in question, but also change. Nyanatiloka grew away from Catholicism to the secularized lay religion of German Romanticism, and then left that, or part of that, behind to embrace Buddhism. Clearly he regarded much of this change as development. He saw the rejection of Catholic ceremonialism, for example, as a con-

scious choice, culminating in his secluded forest life. Similarly, he consciously rejected the musician's life for that of a monk. His chief pupil, the German Nyanaponika, wrote: 'His field of work and his way of life were his conscious choice, and on that account he set aside other available and not inconsiderable abilities and inclinations. It was an act of intentional renunciation (*nekkhama*), more meaningful to him than renunciation of worldly goals and pleasures that had never particularly attracted him, even in youth.'[12] While it is not possible to follow this change in all its dimensions directly through Nyanatiloka's testimony, we can infer those characteristics of his German Romantic view which lent themselves to reinterpretation or improvement in the Buddhist view. This is the more possible as he represents the changes as being gradual, with nothing so dramatic as a conversion experience. It is, rather, a matter of relative congruence: for example, the Buddhist idea of conscious renunciation as applied to music matches Schopenhauer's view of the relative value of music and the saintly life. The incongruency—that Buddhist culture lends music no such all-but-supreme status—was irrelevant to Nyanatiloka's sense of renunciation, however relevant it might be to our understanding of Buddhism.

The fundamental idea of forest solitude, which went before him 'like a red flag' throughout his life, indissolubly unites his Romantic and Buddhist periods. But note that it holds a different place in the two traditions. In the Romantic, the solitude is identified with a glorified and pantheistic Nature which is tame, yet profound. It is a Nature with which young poets of the *Stürm und Drang* had been wont to commune by exposing their bare breasts to the storm on mountaintops; and in which rosy-cheeked boy scouts (*Wandervögel*) could hike, singing melodiously innocent songs: no poisonous snakes. And one could contemplate truth in the night sky.

In the Buddhist context, however, the forest is a much more dangerous place. In both literature[13] and life the jungle is in-

[12] Nyanaponika Thera, 'Nyanatiloka Mahathera, Leben, Werk, und Persönlichkeit', *Die Einsicht*, Heft 7/8 (1957), p. 105.

[13] See the descriptions in the *Vessantara Jātaka*, for example. Margaret Cone and Richard Gombrich, *The Perfect Generosity of Prince Vessantara*, The Clarendon Press (Oxford, 1977), p. 28.

habited by potentially dangerous animals. Villagers shun it. In traditional village religion, in fact, to be alone (*tani veṇḍa*) for even a moment while out walking is to court the spell of some demon or other. The Buddhist hermit, by his spiritual virtues, tames the forest, and finds it a beautiful, indeed rather sensual, place.[14] In the tradition it is not the source of pantheistic wisdom, however, for the real purpose of the forest solitude is inward meditation, and in any case Buddhism has little pantheism about it.

Furthermore, the society to which solitude is opposed is conceived differently in the two traditions. For the German Romantic it is the society of *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*, civil society, the bourgeois world of manners, sensibilities, and morals, which Molière's misanthrope found so distasteful and which Rousseau so enthusiastically detested. It is the society of drawing-rooms, and of the city. To characterize the problem sociologically: it demands that a single polite manner be universally applied to a potentially endless range of individuals whose relations with oneself are in fact quite different. The consequence is that the idea of a sharp division between one's feelings and one's manner —whatever the intellectual source of the idea—receives continual confirmation. And so Hölderlin and von Feuchtersleben, despite their very different personalities, wish to flee to the arms of Nature.

In the Buddhist case society as such does not appear: it is not an explicit category of thought in the texts. We can however fruitfully construe that which is opposed to forest solitude, and this is something quite different from polite society. It is the world of the family, of the bonds of affection and obligation, and of productive toil, usually of an agricultural kind. Perhaps the most eloquent testimony of the opposition is the poem of Dhaniya in the *Sutta Nipāta* (SN 18–34). The herdsman Dhaniya, hearing the roll of thunder, remarks comfortably that his roof is sound, the fire burns cheerfully, his beloved wife and children well, and the cattle grazing safely: 'Rain, clouds, rain if you will', is his refrain. Nearby the Buddha shelters in an empty hut, with no roof and no fire, but his passions are stilled and he enjoys the sublime comfort of his enlightenment; each verse about Dhaniya is followed by one about the Buddha,

[14] Ibid., pp. 97–102.

praising the latter's unshakeable spiritual security, with the refrain, 'Rain, clouds, rain if you will'. (The dénouement comes when Dhaniya is shaken out of his complacency by a huge rainstorm, and he flees with his family to take refuge in the teaching of the Buddha.) This graceful poem expresses quite clearly the sense in which the renouncer's life is 'homeless' (*anagārika*), and it is this opposition which dominates traditional Buddhist literature and thought about renunciation. It reflects, of course, quite a different state of society, in which the family is far more important in one's every activity than in the modern West.

Despite these differences, however, the Buddhist doctrine of *dukkha* is not, as I have pointed out, limited only to the inevitable loss of loved ones and similarly dire events, for it is elsewhere explained in such general terms that it can be applied (by those minded so to apply it) to any existential situation. In this specific sense *dukkha* and renunciation are universal. They furnish the congruence between Nyanatiloka's Romantic wanderings in nature and his life as a Buddhist hermit.

But perhaps the most significant difference, and therefore the most significant change and development in Nyanatiloka's thought, concerns the Romantic and Buddhist views of the self. In the Romantic view—this was already inherent in the idea of the falseness of society—there is a sharp division between the inner and private world of the self and the outer, public person. Nyanatiloka expresses this in his abandonment of all 'external ceremonialism'. This is notably a Protestant reaction against Catholic ritualism, and as such has played a great part in the history of the West; but what is important here is that, for someone like Nyanatiloka who is moving away from both Catholicism and Protestantism, the inner world of the self takes on a correspondingly greater significance, since it has no certain external relation with a God. It is important that Nyanatiloka stands in a line of what might be called secular philosophers of the inner self, Schopenhauer and von Hartmann, and that these may be considered predecessors of Freud and Jung. Another way of putting this is to say that in this line of development, the self, no longer secure in its Christian moorings, is a problem capable of different solutions, such as psychoanalysis or Buddhism. Consistent with this is the view of the self as deep and

mysterious: 'The deepest in a human being can never be described.'

Buddhism is by no means merely an Oriental equivalent of these views, though it was taken as such by many early German enthusiasts of the religion. It holds, in fact, that for practical psychological purposes there is no such thing as a self, but merely a collection of interdependent psychophysical events (*skandha*) with serial but not essential identity in time.[15] This doctrine is intellectually difficult, but Buddhists claim that it is not a mysterious and esoteric doctrine to match a mystic subject. It has an unequivocal psychological purpose: to dissolve all those anxieties and cravings—and craving (*taṇhā*) is after all the source of *dukkha*—which are directed toward the self. If there is no self to have, to desire, or to want to be something, how can these destructive and painful cravings subsist? This is a feature of that timeless Indian wisdom toward which the German Romantics yearned so longingly but did not bargain on finding.

Nor do Buddhists hesitate over a deep division between the inner and outer. For the monk, for example, his inner life begins properly with his command of *sīla*, and this moral purity is rooted in his careful observance of rules, both great and small, which govern his every deed. *Sīla* is both outward and inward (as we shall see in the next chapter), two aspects of the same reality. This robust confidence in the direct efficacy of outward action in the inner life is also connected with the conviction that a man wears his character on his sleeve. A very orthodox genre of contemporary Sinhalese Buddhist literature, for example, are biographies or hagiographies of prominent monks. These straightforward accounts of a monk's life story (*caritaya*) depict his deeds and habits (*caritaya*) as a clear representation of his character (also *caritaya*). Not for these biographers any timid and tentative groping after the subtlest depiction of their subjects' inner states.

These are deep and, for many, irreconcilable differences in sensibility: some Western Buddhists and Buddhist scholars to this day have failed, at great length in print, to accept the consequences of the doctrine of non-self (*anattā*). But for Nyana-

[15] See Steven Collins' forthcoming work, tentatively entitled *Selfless Persons: The Concept of the Person in Buddhist Thought*, Cambridge University Press.

tiloka and those who followed in his footsteps there is a congruence which sets these differences aside, namely the common conviction in the effectiveness of self-cultivation in solitary spiritual discipline. Self-cultivation—*Selbstbildung*—is one of the great and abiding themes of late eighteenth and nineteenth-century German thought, from Goethe to Thomas Mann.[16] It plays a great part, too, in von Feuchtersleben. Nor need one seek very far for a Buddhist equivalent: *bhāvanā*. *Bhāvanā* is usually translated as 'meditation', but as Walpola Rahula points out,[17] it really refers to the entire process of physical, psychological, and intellectual training in Buddhism. It means, in short, cultivation, in a sense not very far removed from that of *Bildung*.

Not very far removed: but far enough removed for the Buddhist discipline to constitute, in the eyes of a seeker like Nyanatiloka, a perceptibly better solution to self-training than was offered by his sources. I have already noted that von Feuchtersleben is vague. This is partly attributable to his style of thought—the vaguer the mysticism, the more successful the book—but it is also an attribute of the intellectual position he shared with so many other German thinkers. For in effect his inconclusive advice about 'studying the genuine science of life' (whatever that might be) is Pietism without the Christianity. And without Christianity such advice about 'religion' and 'self-renunciation' can have no clear content for a mind such as Nyanatiloka's to seize on. How exactly, if one were to set up in a cabin in the woods, would one go about 'cultivating this side of our mental faculties'?

But with Buddhism there is no such vagueness. There are the 227 rules of the monastic code to start with, and the entire shelf of the *Sutta Piṭaka*, the sermons of the Buddha, to carry one on. Once that is mastered—and the eager and intelligent Nyanatiloka mastered it very soon—there is the other shelf of the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*, the meticulous and encyclopedic introspective psychological teaching elaborated from the basic doctrine. And he could then go on to the post-canonical *Visuddhimagga*, a systematic compendium of the meditative life; and all the com-

[16] See W. H. Bruford, *The German Tradition of Self-Cultivation*, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge, 1975).

[17] Rahula, op. cit., p. 67.

mentaries. Buddhists are firmly resolved that there is no intentional mystery or mysticism here, but there is enough teaching of an unambiguous sort to last a lifetime. In the words of the Sinhalese scholar-painter Manjusri: 'The Teaching is like an *iňdiappa* [roughly: plate of spaghetti]: no beginning and no end.' What Buddhism lacks in a mystical doctrine of the self it makes up in an elaborated method for the understanding and training of the self.

CHAPTER 3

The Path of Purification

'He, like the moon, is always a stranger among families'
Candūpama Sutta

This chapter deals with the prescriptions for the forest-dwelling meditative life, contained in the *Visuddhimagga* ('The Path of Purification').[1] Richard Gombrich calls the *Visuddhimagga* 'the unitary standard of doctrinal orthodoxy for all Theravāda Buddhists'.[2] Ñāṇamoli, Nyanatiloka's English pupil, calls it 'a detailed manual for meditation masters' and 'a work of reference'.[3] Any monk who seriously considers undertaking the forest life must come to terms with it. Nyanatiloka translated it into German, and Ñāṇamoli first translated it into English for his own instruction. The Sinhalese monks Asmaṇḍalē Ratanapāla and Vaturuvila Ñāṇānanda set out to read it, with other budding hermitage monks, at the beginning of their careers in the forest. Every educated Sinhalese monk in these pages is well acquainted with it, and those who are uneducated have undertaken some of the practices it recommends.

The first part of this chapter will deal with the *Visuddhimagga* as a systematization of the Buddhist path and the central text of a living and learned tradition. I will discuss a few systematic principles by which it subsumes every aspect of the monk's life, from meditative self-discipline to the public role and social organization of the Sangha. Inevitably the key is purity, and it will be shown how this is the master metaphor not only in the monk's life, but in the monastic civilization which surrounds it.

But, though the learning of the *Visuddhimagga* is daily prac-

[1] *Visuddhimagga of Buddhaghosācariya*, ed. Henry Clarke Warren, Harvard Oriental Series, Vol. 11, Harvard University Press (Cambridge, Mass., 1950). Unless otherwise noted, I use the translations of Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, *The Path of Purification* (Colombo, 1964).

[2] Gombrich, *Precept and Practice*, p. 43.

[3] Ñāṇamoli, *The Path of Purification*, p. xxx.

tised by the strictest monks, it contains lines of thought not entirely consistent with the central intellectual interpretation of Buddhist practice. In the second part of the chapter I will trace the most important of these, the idea of asceticism as an end in itself rather than as a means to enlightenment. This will then serve as the foundation for the chapters in Part II. These describe the formation of a Buddhist monastic aspiration based on this idea of asceticism, and then show how this is a folk or homiletic Buddhism which leads to quite a different sort of monastic practice from that envisioned by the strictest practitioners of the Buddhist path.

The *Visuddhimagga* is the chief product of what G. P. Malalasekera has called 'the silver age' of Pali literature. It was composed sometime shortly prior to A.D. 433,[4] and forms the keystone of the edifice of commentaries to the canon which Buddhaghosa wrote, or perhaps better, edited. Its double nature, as a meditation manual and as a compendium of doctrine, reflects the double nature of Buddhism. On the one hand, as Buddhism is a practical path to overcoming suffering, the *Visuddhimagga* provides detailed (but not exhaustive) instructions for following that path. On the other hand, because the path is by no means simple, a certain amount of learning is necessary: the Buddha's discourses are voluminous, and from the very beginning a body of commentary (transmitted orally at first, like the canon) grew up to explain them. Every monk must be, to some extent, a scholar, and scholarship holds nearly as great a value in Theravāda Buddhism as does asceticism. For Buddhaghosa, then, as for Nyanatiloka, learning and practice are indissolubly wedded.

The *Visuddhimagga* takes the form of a commentary on the following verse from the canon:

> When a wise man, established well in Virtue,
> Develops Concentration and Understanding,
> Then as a bhikkhu ardent and sagacious
> He succeeds in disentangling this tangle.[5]

[4] Here I follow Ñāṇamoli in his introduction to the VM.

[5] VM I. 1. Quoted from *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, I, 13, and elsewhere. In this chapter I will follow the practice of Warren and Ñāṇamoli and quote volume and page numbers for canonical quotations from the Pali Text Society editions. Where Ñāṇamoli had 'Consciousness', I have put 'Concentration' (*samādhi*), which he uses elsewhere and which makes better sense.

Virtue is *sīla*, the conduct of life according to the moral discipline of the monastic rule. Concentration is *samādhi*, unification and concentration of the mind through meditation. Wisdom is *paññā*, insight into the true nature of things (or: understanding in practice the four Noble Truths). These three constitute the path to Nirvana, or, as the verse has it, the way to disentangling the tangle of craving and desire which binds us to suffering. The first part of the *Visuddhimagga* is devoted to *sīla*, the second to *samādhi*, and the third to *paññā*, which form a hierarchy of training: *sīla* is the first concern of the monk and the foundation of the monastic life; then the monk goes on to *samādhi*, whereby his mind is trained to penetrate to *paññā*. The virtue of this arrangement is that it enables Buddhaghosa to subsume both the monastic discipline and the mental training in one discourse, as parts of a comprehensive whole. From my perspective, it enables us to see the inner life of the monk, his behaviour, and ultimately the social organization of the Sangha as expressions of a single principle.

In a sense, however, the *Visuddhimagga* is overdetermined, for there are a number of distinguishable but closely related principles which knit the argument together, and which emphasize slightly different facets of the teaching. I will describe three such principles: psychological pragmatism (*yoniso manasikāra*), purification (*visuddhi*), and isolation (*viveka*).

The first, psychological pragmatism, is a principle which runs throughout the Buddha's teaching, and is expressed by his concentration on the problem of suffering to the exclusion of metaphysical and cosmological speculation. He advocated skilful attention (*yoniso manasikāra*) to, and cultivation of, those conditions of life and states of mind which are profitable (*kusala*), that is, conducive to health and well-being as well as to freedom from suffering. This is the principle which underlies the following, from the *sīla* section of the *Visuddhimagga*:

Discipline (*sīla*) is for the purpose of restraint, restraint is for the purpose of non-remorse, non-remorse is for the purpose of gladdening, gladdening is for the purpose of happiness, happiness is for the purpose of tranquillity, tranquillity is for the the purpose of bliss, bliss is for the purpose of concentration (*samādhi*), concentration is for the pur-

pose of correct knowledge and vision, correct knowledge and vision are for the purpose of dispassion, dispassion is for the purpose of fading away (of greed), fading away is for the purpose of deliverance, deliverance is for the purpose of knowledge and vision of deliverance, knowledge and vision of deliverance are for the purpose of complete extinction (of craving) through not clinging.[6]

Sīla, that is, demands that the monk lead a blameless life, with the consequence that he is not troubled by remorse. Gladdened by this circumstance, he is then able to devote himself to meditation. Prolonged, successful meditation gives rise to a number of pleasant feelings. These in turn culminate in *samādhi*, which is deep concentration, or the 'one-pointedness' (*ekaggatā*) of mind. The clarity of mind in *samādhi* then enables the monk to see things as they are (*yathābhūtaṃ*), that is, as liable to suffering, evanescent, and without a compellingly real essence. This Ñāṇamoli translates as 'correct knowledge and vision'.

The result of seeing things in this light is that the monk loses his taste for them: dispassion arises. This in turn leads to a fading away of interest in such states. This is in fact deliverance but is not fully established until the monk reviews how he arrived at deliverance; and clear knowledge of the process results in complete extinction (*parinibbāna*) of craving. This is 'liberation of the mind through not clinging' (*anupādā cittassa vimokkho*; VM. I. 32), the consummation of the path.

This is of course the process which we have glimpsed in Sumana's praise of 'inner smoothness and cleanness': 'Calm and concentration will gradually enter into the meditator's innermost being. . . .' Western misgivings about the credibility and attractiveness of Theravāda stem not from doubt of this fruit of the path, but from the apparently asocial, if not antisocial, nature of the objective. The path to Nirvana does, however, have social consequences which are spelt out in the *Visuddhimagga*, consequences which are conceived as quite positive for both the monk and society. They are adumbrated in these verses from the *sīla* section of the *Visuddhimagga*:

His virtue is immaculate.
His wearing of the bowl and robes
Gives pleasure and inspires trust,

[6] VM. I. 32. Quoted from Vin. V, 164.

His Going Forth will bear its fruit.

. . . .

A Bhikkhu in his virtue bright
Shines forth in the Ascetics' Wood
As by the brightness of his beams
The moon lights up the firmament.

Now if the bodily perfume
Of virtuous bhikkhus can succeed
In pleasing even deities,
What of the perfume of his virtue?

It is more perfect far than all
The other perfumes in the world,
Because the perfume virtue gives
Is borne unchecked in all directions.

The deeds done for a virtuous man,
Though they be few, will bear much fruit,
And so the virtuous man becomes
A vessel for honour and hospitality.
(VM. I. 159)

The basic metaphor here, that of the 'perfume of virtue' (Pali *sīlagandho*; Sinh. *sil suvaňda*), stands for the reputation of the well-behaved monk, which reaches throughout society. For the monk, this means that he becomes 'a vessel for honour and hospitality', that is, he is well looked after by the laymen. This is ensured by the belief (nearly universally held in Ceylon today) that it is particularly meritorious to support a good monk. This transaction, however, is also subject to a further interpretation (I might better say, a more profound interpretation) from the viewpoint of psychological pragmatism. Merit, *puñña*, is not only a sort of intangible religious good, but is also a psychological good, in that giving to (well-behaved) monks inspires laymen to generosity, happiness, peace, and so forth. Hence the atmosphere at a hermitage during an alms-giving ceremony (Sinh. *dānaya*; or more generally, *pinkama*, act of merit) is strikingly quiet and pious, and, for those laymen susceptible to piety, an occasion of happiness or even reflection. The virtuous monk 'gives pleasure and inspires trust', or, per-

haps better, 'inspires faith' (*pāsādikaṃ hoti pattacīvaradharaṇaṃ*). This is faith, however, in the psychological efficacy of the Dhamma, rather than in some entity.

This in turn implies a notion of the social effect of the virtuous monk, namely, that he influences society by his example (he 'shines forth in the Ascetics' Wood'): that is, the pious layman is not only inspired to good thoughts, but to emulate, so far as he can, the *sīla* of the monk. This was put to me very clearly by Kaḍavädduvē Jinavaṃsa, a learned forest-dwelling monk. He was lying in the hospital in Galle (the chief city of the south of Ceylon) one night when one of his lay supporters came to visit him. In the course of the visit the layman observed to the monk that he, the layman, was happy to help the hermitage monks, though they did no particular good for the world around them. Jinavaṃsa raised himself up on one elbow and pointed out the window at the street-lamp, replying,[7] 'Do you see that street-lamp, Sir? What does it do? It goes nowhere, does nothing, it merely stands there. But would you say we need it or not, Sir? We need it, of course. You can't walk down the street without it. We monks are like that street-lamp. We shed light in the world. The world, you know, is a dark place. It is difficult to know which way to turn. But the monks are there to show the world which way to turn. If we behave well, Sir, if we keep our *sīla*, then the world can go along in our light.' In fact, the effect of well-behaved monks on the laity is, at best, difficult to show. This notion was, however, instrumental in forging a theory of the Sangha's relation to the polity: namely, that the monks are teachers and exemplars to the nation, so that their *sīla* is of national concern.

While psychological pragmatism is a style of thought, the second principle, that of purity (*visuddhi*; or 'purification', to emphasize the dynamic nature of the monk's enterprise), is a metaphor; but a ubiquitous metaphor so variously applied, and so deeply felt, that I would say, with Buddhaghosa, not that the Buddhist path is *like* purification, but that it *is* purification. This is from the verses with which Buddhaghosa begins the *Visuddhimagga*:

[7] From my field notes.

There are here in the Victor's Dispensation
Seekers gone forth from home to homelessness,
And who although desiring purity
Have no right knowledge of the sure straight way

. . . .

Right hard to find, that leads to purity—
Who, though they strive, gain no purity.
To them I shall expound the comforting Path
of Purification [*Visuddhimagga*], pure in expositions

. . . .

. . . let all those
Good men who do desire purity
Listen intently to my exposition.

(VM. I. 4)

Here the monks are spoken of as 'those desirous of purity' (*visuddhikāmā*); and as I have pointed out in the Introduction, the desire for purity (in William James' phrase, for 'purity of heart') is a basic concern—perhaps *the* basic concern—of the Buddhist ascetic. What is sought is clarity, simplicity, and certainty ('right knowledge of the sure straight way'; *khemaṃ ujuṃ maggaṃ . . . yathābhūtaṃ*). As Ñāṇamoli wrote: 'Established as it is for its foundation on the self-evident insecurity of the human situation [the Truth of Suffering], [the teaching] provides an unfailing standard of value, unique in its simplicity, its completeness, and its ethical purity, by means of which any situation can be assessed and a profitable choice made.'[8] The point of the *Visuddhimagga*, then, is to systematize the Buddhist path, and present it in an unambiguously straightforward style; and this systematic clarity is, in so far as its author is concerned, entailed in its master metaphor, purity.

The threefold division of the book is in fact further subsumed under another scheme, the Seven Purifications. These are described at the beginning of the section on *paññā* as follows:

Now the [basic points of doctrine] are the *soil* of *paññā*, and the first two Purifications, namely, Purification of *Sīla* and Purification of Mind [*samādhi*], are its *roots*, while the five Purifications, namely, Purification of View, Purification by Overcoming Doubt, Purification by Knowledge and Vision of What is the Path and What is not the Path, Purification by Knowledge and Vision of the Way, and Purification

[8] VM, pp. vii–viii.

by Knowledge and Vision are the *trunk* [*paññā*]. Consequently one who is perfecting these should first fortify his knowledge by learning and questioning about those things that are the '*soil*', after he has perfected the two Purifications that are the '*roots*', he can develop the five purifications that are the '*trunk*'.

(VM. XIV. 32. I have slightly changed Ñāṇamoli's translation.)

The first Purification is that by *sīla* (*sīlavisuddhi*). There is no part of Buddhist thought where the metaphor of purity is more deeply felt or more thoroughly applied than here. Buddhaghosa writes:

No Ganges, and no Yamunā,
No Sarabhū, Ṣarassatī
Or flowing Aciravatī,
Or noble River of Mahī,
Is able to wash out the stain
In things that breathe here in the world;
For only virtue's water can
Wash out the stain in living things.

(VM. I. 24)

The strength of this feeling is reflected in Buddhaghosa's description of an unvirtuous monk: 'Owing to that unvirtuousness he is as ugly as hemp cloth. . . . He is as hard to purify as a cesspit many years old. . . . Though claiming the bhikkhu state he is no bhikkhu, so he is like a donkey following a herd of cattle. . . . He is as unfit to live with as a dead carcass.' (VM. I. 155)

This distinction of the pure from the impure has great consequences for both the social organization and the psychological propensities of the Sangha. The forest-dwellers tend to form a society of monks who are pure, and to rigorously exclude those who do not measure up to the standard of virtue. Indeed, this rigorous exclusion of the impure is written into the rules for gatherings of the Sangha, so that a monk who has committed a transgression without purifying (*visodheti*) himself by confession may not attend. By the same token, the concern of the polity for the virtue of the Sangha appears in repeated purifications (*visodhanā*) of the Sangha under the auspices of kings in Theravāda history.

Similarly, the preoccupation with *sīla* has great psychological consequences. The theme of cleanliness and dirt plays a great part in monks' dreams, as it does in their daily lives: village temples, as well as hermitages, are conspicuous by their cleanliness and tidiness. It is possible that the movement of ascetics I treat in Chapter 7 failed partially because of their conspicuous untidiness, which prejudiced their support among the laity. Here, of course, the notion of purity as cleanliness touches a level of concern which, in Sinhalese society (but also in other societies, and in Indian civilization in general), informs notions about emotions, persons, and status. A loss of status is described as getting dirty, falling in the mud, etc. Similarly, a great deal of the respect shown to monks on ceremonial occasions is expressed through symbols of cleanliness: they may proceed by having white clothes spread on the ground before them, and, when they enter a house, the householder will wash their feet. It is not surprising that cleanliness, and fastidious observance of the rules of discipline—metaphorical cleanliness—sometimes become ends in themselves.

The description of emotions in terms of purity and impurity appears in the second Purification, Purification of Mind (*citta-visuddhi*), which corresponds to *samādhi*. In developing the concentration and unification of mind in meditation, the monk suppresses the hindrances (*nīvaraṇāni vikkhambhitāni*, VM. IV. 31) such as doubt, excitement, torpor, etc., so that the impurities (*kilesā*) subside; these impurities are lust, hatred, and delusion (*rāga, dosa, moha*). Here purification of the mind has a special meaning, in that it is, first, only a case of the more general purification from such emotions which are the object of the Buddhist path; and second, it is only temporary, in that the *kilesās* are only suppressed, rather than extirpated, as they are through the exercise of *paññā*.

The last five Purifications correspond to the dynamic process of self-correction and discipline of insight which I described under *paññā* as psychological pragmatism. Here the key is the discrimination and renunciation of increasingly subtle states, such as the attachment to the pleasures of meditative concentration, or the spiritual pride of accomplishment. The culmination of this process is Nirvana. In glossing his introductory verse, Buddhaghosa writes: 'Herein, purification should be under-

stood as nibbana [Nirvana], which being devoid of all stains, is utterly pure.' (VM. I. 4)

The third principle is that of *viveka*, which may be variously translated as isolation, seclusion, or retirement. This refers basically to the monk's retirement from the world (*kāya-viveka*), but is also used metaphorically to refer to his isolation from sense desires (*citta-viveka*) in *samādhi*; and to his isolation from clinging (*upadhi-viveka*) in *paññā*.[9] *Viveka* does not figure prominently in the *Visuddhimagga*, but does appear at IV. 82, VII. 63, and XXIII. 50. I have adduced it here because it offers a third way of conceiving the monk's mental discipline, his behaviour, and his social arrangements, in one light. *Kāya-viveka* implies the monk's renunciation of the life of the householder, his *sīla*, and therefore his isolation from the currents of desire (for wealth, women, or children, for example) which characterize the householder's life. It also exemplifies his seclusion in the forest.

Viveka has a further implication, however. Consider this verse from the *Sutta Nipāta*:

> Unfettered, like a deer in the forest,
> Which browses wherever it will,
> A wise man minds his freedom:
> Like the one-horned rhinoceros, wander alone! (SN 39)

This sentiment, echoed throughout the canon, goes beyond seclusion, for it suggests that the monk be self-reliant (*atta-saraṇo*). Self-reliance is the basic constraint under which both the monk's training, and the legal organization of the Sangha, are designed. Thus the newly ordained monk lives in dependence, *nissaya*, on his teacher only until he has mastered enough of the teaching and practice to train himself. Similarly, ratification of any communal act requires unanimous consent (by silence) in a full meeting of the local Sangha. This self-reliance also implies that the monk is, in Louis Dumont's phrase, an

[9] *Upadhi-viveka* is usually taken, by the commentarial tradition, as 'isolation from the substrates of existence', which thereby introduces a metaphysical category, the substrates of existence, which are foreign to the original sense. It would therefore be better read as isolation from clinging.

'individual-outside-the-world', as opposed to the layman, who is a 'man-in-the-world'.[10] It is precisely this emphasis on individual self-training which enabled Nyanatiloka to accept Buddhist monastic life, instead of the Christian.

The key term which links the inner life of the monk with the outer is therefore *sīla*, and the *Visuddhimagga* gives considerable attention to its interpretation. This is the description of a monk with good conduct (*ācāra*):

> . . . A bhikkhu is respectful, deferential, possessed of conscience and modesty, wears his inner robe properly, wears his upper robe properly, his manner inspires confidence whether in moving forwards or backwards, looking ahead or aside, bending or stretching, his eyes are downcast, he has [good] deportment, he guards the doors of his sense faculties, knows the right measure in eating, is devoted to wakefulness, possesses mindfulness and full-awareness, wants little, is contented, is strenuous, is a careful observer of good behaviour, and treats the teachers with great respect. (VM. I. 48.)

Buddhaghosa continues:

> A bhikkhu, having entered inside a house, having gone into a street, goes with downcast eyes, seeing the length of a plough yoke, restrained, not looking at an elephant, not looking at a horse, a carriage, a pedestrian, a woman, a man, not looking up, not looking down, not staring this way and that. (VM. I. 51. Quoted from Nd. 1. 474.)

This image of the graceful, restrained (*saṃvara*) monk is ancient and powerful in Sinhalese Buddhist society: according to Buddhaghosa's introduction (*Nidāna*) to his commentary on the Vinaya (*Samantapāsādikā*), the Indian Emperor Asoka was first attracted to Buddhism by the sight of such a monk walking past the palace. Today, Buddhist laymen have a clear image of this style of deportment: on more than one occasion laymen imitated it for me. It is characterized by, in Ray Birdwhistell's terminology,[11] small *range*—movements tend to be restricted

[10] Louis Dumont, 'Renunciation in Indian Religions', in *Religion, Politics and History in India*, Mouton (The Hague, 1970), pp. 33–61 *passim*. To go slightly beyond Dumont's argument, the essential difference is that the monk's condition is defined by his personal plight (suffering), and his personal solution to it (world-renunciation). He is in consequence defined by individual concerns and therefore, in the abstract, by his individuality. The layman, on the other hand, is defined by his place in a system of relations, the caste system and the family, and therefore, in these terms, has no individuality.

[11] Ray Birdwhistell, *Introduction to Kinesics*, Allen Lane (New York, 1971).

rather than broad; and low *intensity*—they are slow rather than abrupt. Perhaps our nearest equivalent is the deportment of a well-brought-up lady: the voice is gentle, the knees kept together, the arms held close to the body. The glance in public is controlled. Such details of deportment and etiquette are covered in the *sekhiyā*, 'trainings', an appendix of seventy-five rules at the end of the disciplinary code (*Pāṭimokkha*). This training in deportment therefore has a clear social function, in presenting the Sangha to lay supporters (it 'inspires confidence'), and also in paving the way for smooth relations within the Sangha (the monk 'treats the teachers with great respect').

The internal aspect of this training is described thus:

> On seeing a visible object with the eye, he apprehends neither the signs nor the particulars through which, if he left the eye faculty unguarded, evil and unprofitable states of covetousness and grief might invade him, he enters upon the way of its restraint, he guards the eye faculty, undertakes the restraint of the eye faculty. On hearing a sound with the ear . . . On smelling an odour with the nose . . . On tasting a flavour with the tongue . . . On touching a tangible object with the body . . . On cognizing a mental object with the mind, he apprehends neither the signs nor the particulars through which, if . . . (etc.)[12]

This is *sīla* as restraint of the sense faculties (*indriyasaṃvara*). For example, when the monk sees a woman, he is to carefully discriminate the simple perception from perception of those aspects, such as dress, cosmetics, shape, etc., which give rise to attraction, and therefore lust. This is straightforward, in that it is by no means necessary to connect perception with suggestion; but it is also difficult, since for most people the connection is tacit, and therefore automatic.

A less negative interpretation of the internal meaning of the monk's deportment was given me by the monk Tāmbugala Ānandasiri, who pointed out that this is the behaviour of a man occupied with his own business: the business of internal cultivation. Whether going on the alms-round or staying quietly in the hermitage, the monk is to attend to his meditation topic (*kammaṭṭhāna*; lit. 'occasion for work'). It is this business-like attitude

[12] VM. I. 42. Quoted from M. I. 180.

which characterizes the most serious, and best trained, forest-dwellers.

And it is this business-like attitude which we will examine in the last part of this book, 'Working for Wisdom'. Here, however, we turn to an aspect of *sīla* with implications quite different from those so far explicated. Though the way of life described in the *Visuddhimagga* is considered a seamless, single and timeless whole by most of those who follow it—and we are to that extent justified in representing it as such—it is nevertheless a product of history, and that history has involved certain ambiguities, certain unintended consequences.

To continue with *sīla*: it also refers to asceticism proper, that is, to simplicity, poverty, and the rejection of luxury (the ideal monk 'wants little' and 'is contented'): this is '*sīla* with regard to the four requisites' (*paccaya-sannissita-sīla*). These four requisites are food, dress, lodging, and medicine. At his ordination (*upasampadā*) as a monk proper, the new monk is advised as follows: 'This renunciation [is to be conducted] relying on meals of scraps. You are to attempt this throughout your life. Extra allowances are [various ways in which a monk may be invited for a meal, or brought a meal, rather than begging it].' Similarly, the monk is told that he is to rely on robes made of rags, but may also accept, as extra allowances, robes made of other materials; he is to rely on living at the foot of a tree, but may accept different sorts of dwellings or a cave; and he is to rely on medicine made of fermented cow's urine, but may also accept butter, honey, oil, and molasses.[13]

The internal sense of this advice is that the monk should be guided in the use of the requisites by reflecting on their necessity, rather than by greed. To quote Nyanatiloka's rendering of the relevant passage: 'Wisely reflecting he makes use of his robes . . . merely to protect himself against cold and heat etc. Wisely reflecting he makes use of his alms-food . . . merely as a prop and support to this body. . . . Wisely reflecting he makes use of his dwelling . . . merely to keep off the dangers of weather

[13] I translate here from a contemporary manual on ceremonial acts of the Sangha: Rērukānē Candavimala, *Vinaya Karma Pota*, Anula Mudranālaya (Maradāna, 1969), pp. 62–3. The *locus classicus* is *Mahāvagga* I. 30.

and to enjoy solitude. . . . Wisely reflecting he makes use of the necessary medicines, merely to suppress feelings of sickness that arise, and to reach perfect freedom from suffering.'[14]

Significantly, however, the canon is filled with references to the Buddha and his disciples accepting invitations, being given robes, and living in dwellings of one sort or another. Clearly the basic four requisites are, in this formula, a representation of the Sangha's ascetic ideal. Thus Mahākassapa tells the Buddha (at S. XVI. 5) that he is satisfied with the robe made of rags (gathered from discarded rubbish) and the alms food for his own present happiness and out of compassion for those who come after; and he tells the Buddha this after the latter has invited him to live in a more comfortable dwelling, accept invitations to meals, and wear robes offered by laymen. Similarly, the Buddha and Mahākassapa, in conversation,[15] deplore the present state of the Sangha, and hark back to a time when the monks had lived in the forest and praised the forest life, had worn rag robes and praised the wearing of rag robes, had lived from alms food and praised living from alms food, etc. From the very beginning, then, these basic four requisites were not only practical prescriptions for living an unencumbered life, but were also an exemplary model, the emblem or badge of the meditative life. In this connection Walpola Rahula writes: 'All good and holy men, regarded as saints . . . , lived in the past. . . . This ideal past, which in reality never existed, drifts further and further away like a mirage as one draws near it. If one dives deep into that "ideal past" and investigates the experiences of those who lived then, it will be found . . . that they themselves had their eyes fixed on an ever-retreating "ideal past".'[16]

By the time the *Visuddhimagga* was composed, nine hundred years after the death of the Buddha, this ascetic ideal had receded much further from the reality of the Sangha's life, and, as it receded, it became more and more important as an emblem (rather than in its purely practical aspect). The *Visuddhimagga* reveals that in the fifth century A.D., the Ceylonese Sangha were

[14] From the entry '*sīla*' in his *Buddhist Dictionary*. This is a translation of M. I. 2. It is commented on at VM. I. 85–97.

[15] S. XVI. 8.

[16] Walpola Rahula, *History of Buddhism in Ceylon*, M. D. Gunasena and Co. (Colombo, 1956), p. 199.

chiefly village priests, preachers, and scholars, the literary and cultural elite of a nation. Hence the monk who went to the forest to follow the path of purification renounced not the household life, but the life of a cultural specialist in society. Hence there are two lists, the ten impediments (*palibodhā*) and the eighteen faults (*dosā*) of a monastery,[17] which are to be rejected by the meditating monk. Among the impediments are a class of pupils, who are to be entrusted to another monk; overseeing building work in a monastery; a group of lay supporters for which the monk takes responsibility; and responsibility for preserving and transmitting the scriptures. Similarly, inappropriate monasteries include one that is new, where building work is still going on; one that is dilapidated, where the monk will have to see to its repair; or one that is famous, where 'there are always people coming who want to pay homage to him, supposing that he is an *arhat* [saint] which inconveniences him'.[18]

Among the faults of a monastery there is one that is particularly revealing: 'where there are bhikkhus living who are incompatible and mutually hostile, when they clash and it is protested [by the meditator] "Venerable sirs, do not do so", they exclaim "We no longer count now that this refuse-rag wearer has come." '[19] Here it is clear that the wearing of rag robes, the most visible of the strictly interpreted four requisites, was the emblem of the monk's commitment to the meditative life.

In fact I propose to refer to the basic four requisites as *emblematic*: on the one hand, they are not symbolic, for there is no difference between the signified and the signifier (the monks really did practise such asceticism); but on the other hand, they became a way of representing both the seriousness of the meditator's purpose, and his separation from society and the rest of the Sangha. Inherent in this is the possibility that the emblems of asceticism could become ends in themselves, taking on a disproportionate significance; or that they could even be manipulated. The *Visuddhimagga* quotes an early commentarial passage to warn against the manipulation of these emblems by 'one of evil wishes, who wants robes, food, etc.' Thus, when

[17] VM. III. 29–56 and IV. 2–18. [18] VM. IV. 10.
[19] VM. IV. 14.

laymen invite a hypocritical monk to accept robes, or meals, or a comfortable dwelling, he replies, 'What has an ascetic [*samaṇa*] to do with expensive robes? It is proper for an ascetic to gather rags from a charnel ground or from a rubbish heap . . . and make them into a patchwork cloak to wear. What has an ascetic to do with expensive alms food? It is proper for an ascetic to get his living by the dropping of lumps [of food into his bowl] while he wanders for gleanings. [And the same for the other two requisites.]' He then relents, and tells the laymen that he will accept their offerings out of compassion for them, that they may gain merit. This is quoted from the *Mahāniddesa* (I. 224–5), and so dates from perhaps seven hundred years before Buddhaghosa, but was as relevant to him as it is today.

The commentaries and the *Mahāvaṃsa*, the Sinhalese Buddhist chronicle, provide abundant evidence of the adoption of the emblems of asceticism as rough designations for those who undertake the meditative life. Perhaps the earliest source is the commentary to the *Anguttara Nikāya*, which identifies the rag-robe wearers (*paṃsukūlikā*) as opposed to the preachers (*dhammakathikā*); Walpola Rahula notes that they were not two different formally constituted groups, 'but only two groups of the same community leading two different ways of life'.[20] The *Mahāvaṃsa* records gifts by kings, from about the sixth century A.D., to rag-robe wearers and to forest-dwellers (*āraññakā*).[21] The chronicle is not clear whether these are the same or different groups, but I believe that these are simply designations for those who undertook the ascetic life, as opposed to the literary specialists. The same rough designations are used today: ascetic and meditating monks may be referred to variously as, for example, forest-dwelling monks (*vanavāsi bhikṣun vahansēlā*), ascetic monks (*tāpasa bhikṣun vahansēlā*), or meditators (*yōgāvacarayō*), depending on which facet of the life is to be emphasized. Significantly, the forest-dwellers are sometimes referred to as

[20] Rahula, *History of Buddhism in Ceylon*, p. 195. Since Rahula uses a Sinhalese version of the commentary, which is not now available to me, I have not been able to trace this passage in the PTS edition.

[21] The relevant references are collected in Rahula, *History of Buddhism in Ceylon*, pp. 195–7, and Wilhelm Geiger, *Culture of Ceylon in Mediaeval Times*, Otto Harrassowitz (Wiesbaden, 1960), pp. 202–3.

tapassi in the *Mahāvaṃsa*:[22] this term is usually applied to non-Buddhist ascetics who practise self-mortification, and suggests the extent to which Buddhist asceticism had acquired the fascination in itself which asceticism holds in other Indian traditions. It is little wonder that, in the ninth century, a group of rag-robe wearers separated themselves and formed an autonomous group;[23] the forest-dwellers do the same today.

The notion that asceticism became emblematic goes a long way toward explaining the thirteen *dhutanga*s, ascetic practices, to which Buddhaghosa devotes an entire chapter in the *Visuddhimagga* (VM. II). These practices are as follows:

1. *Paṃsukūlikanga*: wearing rag robes.
2. *Tecīvarikanga*: using only three robes.
3. *Piṇḍapātikanga*: begging alms.
4. *Sapadānacārikanga*: not omitting any house while begging (i.e. not going only to the most generous houses).
5. *Ekāsanikanga*: eating only once a day.
6. *Pattapiṇḍikanga*: eating only from the bowl.
7. *Khalu-pacchā-bhattikanga*: no second helpings.
8. *Āraññikanga*: living in the forest.
9. *Rukkhamūlikanga*: living at the foot of a tree.
10. *Abbhokāsikanga*: living in the open air.
11. *Sosānikanga*: living in a cemetery.
12. *Yathā-santhatikanga*: being satisfied with whatever dwelling one receives.
13. *Nesajjikanga*: sleeping in a sitting position and never lying down.

The history of these is instructive. The word *dhutanga* does not appear in the canon, and the full list appears only in a late appendix, the *Parivāra*. However, some of the practices are mentioned in the earliest portions of the canon. Nine (Nos 1, 3, 5, and 8–13) appear at *Majjhima Nikāya* III. 113: here they are mentioned, along with other attributes or accomplishments—such as being born of a noble family, being learned, being a preacher, and attaining certain meditative states (*akiñcaññāyatanaṃ*)—on account of which the monk is not to pride himself at the expense of others. From this it is clear that the *dhutanga*s are

[22] See *Mahāvaṃsa* xli 99 and liv 20. [23] *Mahāvaṃsa* li 52.

by no means an essential part of the Buddhist path. It is also clear that some of them are doubtful, in that they are very close to the self-mortification of non-Buddhist ascetics. Thus, at *Majjhima Nikāya* I. 40, the Buddha announces: 'I say that it is not merely by wearing a robe that a robe-wearer is a [proper] monk; nor merely by going naked; nor by [being covered with] dust and dirt; nor by bathing thrice a day; nor by living at the foot of a tree; nor by living in the open; nor by always standing erect; nor by a [voluntary] regimen in eating; nor by chanting texts; nor by having matted locks.' Here living at the foot of a tree and living in the open are explicitly included in the *dhutangas*, but are also practised by non-Buddhist ascetics; two others, a regimen in eating and standing erect, may be interpreted as variants of Nos 2–7 and 13, and are also practised by non-Buddhists; and the others are completely non-Buddhist.

In the late portions of the canon the *dhutangas* are explicitly condemned. At *Parivāra* VI. 5, the following words are attributed to the Buddha: 'Because of stupidity and silliness [one undertakes the ascetic practices]; because of evil wishes, overcome with desires [one undertakes etc.]; out of madness and confusion . . . ; believing [falsely] that they are praised by Buddhas and Buddhas' disciples . . . ; *not with regard to* fewness of wishes, contentment, effacement [of desires], seclusion, modest needs [one undertakes the ascetic practices].'

This seems to be one side of a debate; for at *Anguttara Nikāya* III. V. 81–90 we find the passage of which this is probably a reworking and a refutation. There it refers to nine *dhutangas* (Nos 1, 5, and 7–13). The first four clauses are the same as in the *Parivāra*, that is, from, 'Because of stupidity and silliness', to 'believing that they are praised by Buddhas and Buddhas' disciples'. The last clause reads, '*Just with regard to* fewness of wishes, contentment, effacement, seclusion, modest needs, one undertakes the ascetic practices.'[24] It goes on to explain that the monk who practises for these (psychological) reasons, rather

[24] This merely involves the difference between *ñeva* in the first passage and *yeva* in the second: . . . *appicchataṃ ñeva* (*yeva*) *nissāya* . . . *āraññako hoti*. Furthermore, in the first passage I have translated 'vaṇṇitaṃ Buddhehi Buddhasāvakehi ti' as 'believing [falsely] that they are praised by the Buddhas and their disciples'. In the second passage, however, this is to be construed as simply 'because they are praised by the Buddhas and their disciples'.

than out of stupidity, etc. is the 'chief, the best, the foremost, the highest, the most excellent' among those who undertake the ascetic practices. We may infer, therefore, that at this period, roughly the fourth or early third centuries B.C., the *dhutangas* were well established among the Sangha, but that their significance, and their justification, was by no means settled.

By perhaps the beginning of the Christian era[25] their significance had been settled, and their emblematic nature had come to the fore: in the *Milindapañho*, composed about that time, they appear as a necessary part of the meditator's progress, as the badge of his commitment, and very nearly as an end in themselves. In this book King Milinda asks the monk Nāgasena whether there are householders who have attained Nirvana. Nāgasena replies that there are a great many who have. The king then asks, 'If householders, living in a house and enjoying the pleasures of the senses, are capable of Nirvana, why undertake the noble qualities of asceticism (*dhutaguṇa* = *dhutanga*)?'[26] Here the connection between the *dhutangas* and the meditative life is implicit. Nāgasena replies that those householders who had attained Nirvana had all practised the *dhutangas* in a previous life; and indeed he seems to imply that one would have to practise them for more than one lifetime to attain Nirvana.[27] He goes on to praise the *dhutangas* at great length, and the terms in which he does so leave no doubt that he considers them a very great enterprise indeed. He explicitly connects them with the emotionally charged complex of purity and cleanliness: 'Like water, O great king, are the *dhutangas*, in that they wash away the stains of the defilements of those desirous of purity.'[28]

This, of course, is the link with the *Visuddhimagga*: 'those desirous of purity' (*visuddhikāmā*) is precisely how Buddhaghosa describes the monk setting out on the path of purification. It is reasonable to infer, in fact, that Buddhaghosa had the *Milindapañho* very much in mind when he wrote the *Visuddhimagga*. He begins his description of the *dhutangas* by pointing out that they

[25] See *Milinda's Questions*, tr. I. B. Horner, Sacred Books of the Buddhists, Luzac and Co. (London, 1963), pp. xxi-xxii.

[26] *Milindapañho*, ed. V. Trenckner, Pali Text Society (London, 1928), p. 351.

[27] Na mahārāja dhutaguṇesu pubbāsevanaṃ vinā ekissa yeva jātiyā arahattaṃ saccikiriyā hoti. *Milindapañho*, p. 353.

[28] *Milindapañho*, p. 353.

are to be undertaken after the monk has perfected his ordinary *sīla*, but before he can start meditation proper:

Now while [one intent on meditation] is engaged in the pursuit of virtue, he should set about undertaking the ascetic practices in order to perfect those special qualities of fewness of wishes, contentment, etc., by which the virtue of the kind already described is cleansed. For when his virtue is thus washed clean of stains by the waters of such special qualities as fewness of wishes, contentment, effacement [of desires, etc.], it will become quite purified; and his vows will succeed as well. And so, when his whole behaviour has been purified by the special quality of blameless virtue and vows . . . he may become worthy to attain . . . delight in meditation.[29]

The monk is to undertake the vows formally, and here Buddhaghosa adds an anachronistic detail: 'During the Blessed One's [Buddha's] lifetime all ascetic practices should be undertaken in the Blessed One's presence. After his death this should be done in the presence of a principal disciple. [And so forth, through *arhat*s, and various grades of teachers, until finally he may undertake the vows himself.].'[30] Buddhaghosa then goes into great detail concerning the conduct and purpose of each of the *dhutanga*s.

I will take as an example the rag-robe practice, *paṃsukūlikanga*.[31] The cloth may be 'one from a charnel ground, one [thrown out] from a shop, a cloth from a street, a cloth from a midden, one from a child-bed', etc. The monk is to tear off the rotten bits, and use the rest. Significantly this practice, like the others, is divided into grades (*pabhedo*). The strict grade is observed by those who do in fact take only discarded cloths. The medium grade involves taking a cloth which is left by someone on a path which the monk frequents: here the practice is purely emblematic, for this is but a version of the practice of almsgiving by the laity. In the mild grade another monk offers the cloth by placing it at the *paṃsūkulika*'s feet. The benefits of the practice are described thus:

He actually practises in conformity with the [basic four requisites]; he is established in the first of the Noble One's Heritages;[32] there is no

[29] VM. II. 1. [30] VM. II. 13.

[31] VM. II. 15–21.

[32] *Ariyavaṃsā*. The first three of these are rag robes, alms food, and dwelling at the foot of a tree, while the fourth is meditation. See *Anguttara* II, p. 26.

suffering due to protecting [one's belongings]; he exists independent of others; there is no fear of robbers; there is no craving connected with use of robes; it is a requisite suitable for an ascetic [*samaṇa*]; it is a requisite recommended by the Blessed One thus 'valueless, easy to get, and blameless';[33] it inspires confidence; it produces the fruits of fewness of wishes, etc.; the right way is cultivated; a good example is set to later generations.[34]

From this it is clear how difficult it is to distinguish between the emblematic and the practical aspects of the *dhutangas*. On the one hand, because the meditative life had become (probably very early in Sangha history) a special vocation within the Sangha, special ascetic practices were made a part of the meditators' discipline. These took on the colouring of pan-Indian asceticism, and also appealed to the emotional (and potentially pathological) roots of all asceticism.[35] On the other hand, the emblematic character of the special practices was itself interpreted in the sober terms of psychological pragmatism. Thus the *paṃsukūlikanga* is 'suitable for an ascetic', and it recalls 'The Noble One's Heritages'; but it also, for these very reasons, 'inspires faith (*pāsādikatā*)'. In the next chapter I will suggest that some nineteenth and twentieth century meditating monks placed great emphasis on asceticism; though, since they followed the *Visuddhimagga*, asceticism did not become wholly an end in itself for them. I will then turn to the development of a folk ascetic tradition, based not so much upon the *Visuddhimagga* as on Buddhist folklore, in which asceticism did become an end in itself.

[33] A. II, p. 26. [34] VM. II. 21.

[35] The *Milindapañho* not only praises the joys of the *dhutangas* in terms of purification and cleanliness, but it also condemns manipulation of them in the most emotionally charged and horrifying terms: the hypocrite goes to hell, where he is tortured like someone of low birth usurping the status of a noble (*khattiya*) and a king. He has 'a fire kindled in his mouth after it has been opened wide with spikes, his body or hand wrapped in oil-soaked rags and set on fire to make it look like a wreath of flames or a burning lamp', etc. *Milindapañho*, pp. 357–8.

Asceticism and Aspiration

CHAPTER 4

The Sinhalese Monk Paññānanda

Asleep and awake it is just the same: we are telling ourselves stories all the time.

Liam Hudson

A story may be true, yet mythical in character.

E. Evans-Pritchard

It seems to me that story-telling comes partly from an urge to make an organized narrative out of chaos.

John Le Carré

In this chapter we meet the Sinhalese monk Puvakdaṇḍāvē Paññānanda, a nineteenth-century forest-dweller, who founded the oldest continually occupied hermitages now extant in Ceylon: Baṭuviṭa and Kirinda. We shall compare the sources of his aspiration with Nyanatiloka's; we shall get a closer glimpse of how hermitages are founded; and we will discuss precisely how tradition is replicated.

The following is from my journal, 22 January 1974, concerning a visit to Kirinda:

We turned off the main road in the valley at about 2 o'clock on a very hot afternoon. The side road led through dense settlement and then up a steep hill, for about a mile, through old and declining tea plantations. This must have all been jungle when Paññānanda came here in 1850 or so. At the top we found some straggling dirt huts clustered next to a small preaching hall and the office of Kirinda hermitage. The huts were new, built by the poor pushed out of the fertile valley below. The lay manager, who was sitting on the porch of his tiny office, said that the preaching hall was at least as old as he was: sixty or so. He was thin, dignified, slow and easy, dressed in the regulation white of lay helpers around the hermitage. He thought the monks would be willing to see us, so he locked the office and led us up the path into the forest. A boy came panting behind us. He had run all the way from the valley below to see the 'white gentlemen'.

We were at once plunged into tall old forest. The forest floor was relatively clear: the trees probably had not been cut since the area became a hermitage a hundred and twenty years before. The path had been laboriously raised and a channel cut beside it, to let the water from the frequent rain run away. As we wound slowly uphill, we naturally spoke more gently. The melodious jungle silence took over: a jungle crow's percussive cry sounded, and another answered, emphasizing the cool space around us. We passed a small Bo tree planted by a very clear stream, and then came to a bridge. There were fish below in the water. A sign introduced the hermitage proper: 'respect the silence'. There, spread among the trees, were the small, clean, light blue houses of the monks, cool and bright against the mossy green. Here it was always dusk. We were led to the head monk's house, where he was sitting, silent and watchful, in a shadowy corner of his porch.

The founding of this hermitage represented one of the high points of the revival of Buddhism in Ceylon in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Between the arrival of the Portuguese in 1505 and the acquisition of the coastal provinces by the British in the 1790s, Buddhism in Ceylon had suffered from both colonial oppression and Sinhalese disunity. For most of that period there were not even properly ordained monks in the island, though the Kandyan kings (who retained hegemony over the central highlands until 1815, when the British took over) had tried more than once to reinstate ordination from Burma or Thailand; and certainly monastic learning, on which serious monastic practice is founded, had been thoroughly eclipsed. Upon the institution of the Siyam Nikāya, an ordination tradition brought from Thailand in 1753 under the auspices of King Kīrti Srī Rājasiṃha, there ensued both a renaissance of learning and the re-establishment of Buddhist temples with properly ordained monks throughout Ceylon. Though there were some meditators among the Siyam Nikāya, these soon disappeared and the *nikāya** became the peasant Buddhist Sangha of literary and cultural specialists which it is today. Furthermore, ordination in the Siyam Nikāya was limited, by royal decree, to the highest caste, the Goyigama.

In 1803 a second stage of development began, when a group

* *nikāya*: a group of monks, all of whom trace their line of pupillary succession back to a single founder or small group of founders; therefore a 'family' of monks.

of Low Country monks went to Burma to get ordained and start an independent ordination tradition—a *nikāya*—in Ceylon. Other monks followed their example, and in time these new groups came collectively to be called the Amarapura Nikāya, after the city in Burma where they had been ordained. As Dr Malalgoda has pointed out,[1] these monks were generally from castes other than the Goyigama to which the Siyam Nikāya was limited, and the movement of those castes' leaders to found their own lines of pupillary succession, with their own temples, sprang from the wish to provide their people with spiritual care and their sons with religious careers. The Amarapura Nikāya was noted for its learning and, most important from our point of view, they commanded a certain expertise in virtuoso religious practice, whether because of their own experience or because of their contact with foreign monks. The flourishing state which Buddhism attained in the nineteenth century is partially attributable to these new developments, and partially to the *Pax Britannica* which brought peace and settled social conditions to an island which had been plagued with war and religious oppression for three hundred years.

It was in this atmosphere that Paññānanda grew up to become one of the leading forest-dwellers of his time. His biography is of interest for historical reasons, but it is of special relevance because to an extent it reflects that of Nyanatiloka: Paññānanda was from a notably pious family, and was particularly pious himself as a child; he read Buddhist literature with his peers, and was inspired to renounce the world because of that reading; he became a monk as a young man, and in time a stern monastic figure, like Nyanatiloka, in the mould of the *Visuddhimagga*. The differences are equally instructive. His childhood aspiration was toward Buddhist asceticism, whose glories were conveyed to him through Buddhist folk literature, and the emblematic significance of that asceticism remained with him throughout his life. The same can hardly be said of Nyanatiloka, for whom the emotional charge of asceticism was always subjected to its pragmatic purpose. Furthermore, though Paññā-

[1] For much of the nineteenth-century background I have relied on Kitsiri Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society, 1750–1900*, University of California Press (Berkeley, 1976).

nanda, like Nyanatiloka, lived a full meditative life, he devoted his other energies not to scholarship, but to preaching, teaching, and founding hermitages.

Paññānanda was born in about 1817,[2] two years after the fall of the Kandyan kingdom, in the village of Puvakdaṇḍāva, near Tangalle, on the southern coast of Ceylon. His paternal grandfather had been a minister (though not a very important one) under one of the last kings of Kandy, but had been forced to flee to the lowlands after an unsuccessful rebellion. The ex-minister settled in Puvakdaṇḍāva, apparently in circumstances befitting his rank, and married his son to a Low Country lady.

Paññānanda's birth to this family of the petty nobility—presumably *radala*, the highest subcaste of the Goyigama—must have substantially informed his later career. He would have expected the best that Sinhalese society had to offer, whether public office, economic advantage, or religious preferment, and he would have been accustomed to think well of himself. His parents died when he was young, which did not trammel his aspirations, but which may well have given them the sombre colouring they later took on. As Gananath Obeyesekere has pointed out,[3] children who have lost their parents are objects of special pity in Ceylon, and the assumption may be made that such a loss is the result of sin in a previous life. Paññānanda's later eloquence, as a preacher, on the fruits of sin in hell, and his strict asceticism, may have owed something to this belief.

The religious atmosphere at his home was very pious. When the family did not worship twice a day at the temple, they did so at home, offering flowers, oil lamps and the like before the Buddha image.[4] This trait remained with Paññānanda throughout his life: he arranged for a flower pond to be built at both Baṭuviṭa and Kirinda, and offered hundreds of blue lotuses every day. His biographers are pleased to record, too,

[2] My sources for Paññānanda's life are, first, Kōḍāgoḍa Upasena, *Puvakdaṇḍāvē Śrī Paññānanda Mahā Thera Caritaya* (Colombo, n.d.); second, an account of Paññānanda's life, on which this first was largely based, by Mātara Ñāṇindāsabha—this had no title page, so I will simply call it *Caritaya*; and third, interviews with elder monks of the Rāmañña Nikāya.

[3] Gananath Obeyesekere, 'The Idiom of Demonic Possession, A Case Study', *Social Science and Medicine*, Vol. 4, 1970, pp. 97–111.

[4] Richard Gombrich has pointed out to me that, at this period, only nobility would have had a home shrine.

that he was loath to kill even tiny ants as a boy. Like other boys of his station, he learned to read and write Sinhalese at the local temple. In later youth his piety deepened following a pilgrimage with fellow villagers to the top of Adam's Peak—one of Ceylon's most revered holy sites. Finally, on an occasion when he had gathered with friends to read religious poetry (most Sinhalese poetry is religious), he heard a poem which inspired him to become a monk.

This was of course the crucial moment. Paññānanda was twenty-three years old, and was farming, the occupation appropriate to his caste. His family had already completed the negotiations with another family to provide him with a wife—again of the appropriate caste—and the auspicious date for the wedding had even been set by an astrologer. His decision to become a monk is described thus:

> Then, upon hearing a friend read out the Temiya Jātaka poem, this honourable son of good family became disgusted with *saṃsāra* (worldly life). He went to his relatives, who were making preparations to bind him firmly to his own lay home, and said, 'If you have any love for me, kindly don't marry me off.' He said firmly, 'Please give me permission to become a monk.' On hearing this his relatives made various attempts to alter his resolve. Nevertheless, because he gave no scope to such attempts, they notified the other family of the matter, stopped all preparations for the wedding, and gave their permission. Then, on the very day that was set for the marriage . . . at the very same auspicious moment . . . , he was ordained as a novice.[5]

Of particular significance here is that Paññānanda's ordination took place at the same moment his wedding was to have occurred. There is no reason to doubt this—there are only a certain number of astrologically determined auspicious moments—but this detail, and Paññānanda's reluctance to kill ants, have the quality of myth; in Evans-Pritchard's words, they are concerned with 'the moral significance of situations'.[6] But what is more to the point here is another observation of Evans-Pritchard in the same place: 'A story may be true yet mythical in character.' Many of the recorded details of Paññānanda's life have this character. Sometimes particular incidents evoke

[5] Kōḍāgoḍa Upasena, *Puwakdaṇḍāvē Śrī Paññānanda Mahā Thera Caritaya*, p. 10.

[6] E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Essays in Social Anthropology*, Faber and Faber (London, 1969), p. 53.

particular moral qualities in the monk's life. For the present I will suggest two reasons why this is so. First, the details preserved by Paññānanda's biographers, who were his pupils in his later years, would have been told them by Paññānanda himself, or by his other pupils, and would have already been selected for their moral significance. Second, since Paññānanda was so pious, and since Sinhalese Buddhist culture distinguishes, and to an extent encourages, the character traits which underlie such piety, he did in fact live much of his life in terms of moral significance. In the conclusion to this chapter I will describe in greater detail how these processes—the actual replication of a living tradition—may be understood.

The tale which inspired Paññānanda, the Temiya Jātaka, is briefly as follows. It describes a birth of the Buddha, previous to his enlightenment, in which he was the heir to the king of Benares. While still an infant in arms he realized the pains of hell that awaited him if he were to inherit the kingdom and be forced to mete out justice to criminals. He therefore acted deaf, dumb, and lame, bearing tremendous trials throughout childhood and youth, until his father decided to have him buried alive as a potential curse on the kingdom. The Buddha-to-be then became an ascetic and converted everyone, including the king his father. Here, on the one hand, are the themes of childhood suffering and the terrors of hell, which, as I have speculated, played an important part in Paññānanda's religious preoccupations. On the other hand, here is the same appeal to youthful aspiration and vanity which led Nyanatiloka to see himself converting a church full of people, or dying the martyr's death in Africa.

But though ordained with due ceremony, the young aspirant found temple life a far cry from his vision. He had been ordained into an ordinary Siyam Nikāya village temple, which is more a part of the social and political world of the village than of an ascetic order bent on salvation. He was made to learn the temple duties which fall to all novices: attending elder monks (*mahāthera vat*) and visitors (*āgantuka vat*); and caring for the Bo tree courtyard and the stupa (*sǟ maḷu bō maḷu vat*). He did this willingly, but he began to see that there was little more in this than enough education to be able to preach, and a quiet life as the village monk's pupil and servant until he succeeded to the

post when the monk died. Rather than relinquish his aspirations, Paññānanda began walking through the village for alms, going strictly from house to house—one of the *dhutangas*. At the same time he began to go to various renowned monks in the area to ask their advice on how to live the proper monk's life.

He met with difficulty on both fronts. In begging from house to house he found that the people did not have a very clear idea of what they were to do, since village monks did not customarily beg. Hence he either got no food, or else a bowlful of *kurakkan* (a millet-like grain), a drier meal than which it is hard to imagine. (Paññānanda's contemporaries met the same problem. One was seen to eat leaves from the trees when no other food was available, so when he went begging in the village he was given a bowlful of leaves.) By the same token, when he asked for guidance, he encountered ignorance, indifference, or the advice that he would only get into trouble wandering about asking questions, and should stay at home. His teacher at the temple must have been thoroughly alarmed by these vagaries, for one day, in the midst of Paññānanda's spiritual crisis, the teacher showed him a deed which had been drawn up, giving him the second storey of the temple building, half the temple lands, half the property in the temple, even half the brass and copper pots and pans. He replied that he had not become a monk so as to acquire pots and pans but to put an end to suffering. Thereafter he went much further afield to seek advice.

Paññānanda must have wandered about, searching for a teacher, for perhaps two years. It was now about 1845, and he was in his late twenties. It cannot have been easy searching for monks who could help him in the climate of opinion then prevalent among the sedentary Sangha of the countryside, and it is no small achievement that he persisted until he found what he sought. Nevertheless the Buddhist revival was quietly in progress, and he found his way to Tōlaṃgamuvē, a monk who had left the upcountry Siyam Nikāya to be ordained in the Amarapura Nikāya. Tōlaṃgamuvē had supporters among the Sabaragamuva Kandyan nobility, who were inclined to support learned and virtuous monks, and he had lived some time in a hermitage among the sodden Sabaragamuva hills. Details on this crucial period of Paññānanda's life are not very abundant, but it seems that Tōlaṃgamuvē turned the novice over to one

Vitārannādeniyē Indasāra, under whom he learned the basics of the monastic life: some Pali certainly, probably the *Dhammapada* (an ancient Pali collection of didactic verses), and the *Pāṭimokkha* code of monastic rules. In 1847 he received his higher ordination under the presidency of some of the leading lights of the Amarapura Nikāya, and took as his teacher (a monk must live under the tutelage of a senior monk for at least five years) the formidable scholar of monastic discipline, Lankāgoḍa Siri Saddhammavaṃsapāla Dhīrānanda. Under him Paññānanda learned 'enough Pali to read the canon, commentaries, and subcommentaries . . . [so that] he could fulfil his monastic life'.[7] He then went to Sumangala, a forest-dwelling monk in the Sabaragamuva area, about whose strictness and asceticism tales are still told, and studied insight meditation for a short while. Thereafter he studied with Tōlaṃgamuvē, who arranged for him to live in a forest hermitage in those same rain-soaked Sabaragamuva hills.

Here he developed the way of life which he was to follow for the rest of his life. His biographers stress, on the one hand, his devotion to meditation, and on the other, his practice of the *dhutangas*: he practised all of them at one time or another. Occasionally he would spend some time living at the foot of a tree, or living in the open with nothing but a shelter of robes draped on sticks. Sometimes he would go in the middle of the night to a cemetery, to meditate on death. Or else he would take the vow not to lie down, but to limit himself to sitting, standing, or walking. More permanent vows included eating only the first bowl of food he received, and eating only once a day. Furthermore, he kept only three robes, and used discarded cloth to make them—though it is likely that, as in ancient times, laymen simply left the robes for him by the side of a path he frequented. Nor would he accept invitations to meals, but continued to beg his food. Here again special arrangements were made: a hall was built at the edge of the forest, where the villagers would bring the food. Paññānanda would come, gather it up, and return to the forest to eat it. (This is standard practice at forest hermitages.) Finally, he took fermented cow's urine as medicine, so that he fulfilled the basic four requisites.

His daily schedule is not preserved, but may be inferred from

[7] Upasena, op. cit., p. 12.

the daily schedule that his chief pupil, Raṃsāgoḍa Sumana, promulgated for Kirinda hermitage. He rose at 4 a.m., chanted *pirit* (apotropaic verses), washed up and swept his dwelling and courtyard. Until 8 o'clock he would meditate, then bathe and worship before the Buddha image. (Note that worship, *vandanā karanavā*, means to remember the qualities of the Buddha—*Buddhānussati*—and to confirm one's intention to follow his path. This is not worship of a deity.) Next, he would gather his alms, return, offer part of them before the Buddha image, and then eat. After eating, he would clean the shrine room and return to his dwelling for a rest. Then, until 4 o'clock in the afternoon, he would meditate or read. At 4 o'clock the grounds would again be swept, and he would again meditate until 6 o'clock, when he would worship before the Buddha image again, chant *pirit*, and give merit to the gods (I will discuss this shortly). Thereafter, he would meditate or read until 10 o'clock at night. This schedule is more or less typical of all hermitages, and most of it can be found in the commentaries.[8] While by no means an active life, it includes exercise, rest, and meditation. Much of the meditation, in fact, is done while walking back and forth on a meditation walkway.

At the hermitage in the Sabaragamuva hills Paññānanda finished his apprenticeship. The moment is embodied in this scene from the biography: 'One day at the hermitage he climbed to the top of a mountain and looked in the direction of Mātara [District], his birthplace. He thought, "It would be greatly to the advantage of the laymen and monks there if I went to my own area and lived, fulfilling the life of the meditator." '[9] The terms in which his presence would 'be of advantage' are as follows: first, his strict way of life would be a moral inspiration to both laymen and monks; second, it would give the laymen an opportunity to accrue merit; and third, he would be able to take pupils and train them in the hermitage life. This marks the beginning of Paññānanda's *lō vāḍa*, work in the world, though this by no means corresponds to what we think of as social work.

This must have been in the early 1850s. Paññānanda left for the Mātara area with another monk, and they made their home

[8] See, for example, the commentary to the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta.*

[9] Upasena, op. cit., p. 12.

—it must have been very primitive—in the forest at Yatiyana Horondūva Kiyanakälē, where the villagers supported them. Later they moved to Puhulvälla, Māḍolē Kälē, and there Paññānanda was, in a sense, discovered: for a very important man of the area, Don Pilippu Vikramasiṃha Guṇasēkara Oviṭigamvalakaḍa Vidāna Āracci Mahatmayā, became convinced—*pähädunnē*—of Paññānanda's virtues and organized the villagers to build him a proper hermitage deep in the forest above the valley at Kirinda. This word, *pähädenavā*, is etymologically related to the Pali *pāsādika*, which implies that the layman was delighted by Paññānanda, and therefore had confidence and faith in him. It embodies the social consequences of his asceticism; here, as with many of the other monks in this study, these consequences were far-reaching. In time his fame spread, and people came from many miles away to offer him food and the monk's requisites, some staying for weeks.

Part of his success was no doubt attributable to his preaching ability. Thus his biographer:

> This reverend elder's conduct of sermons, advice and exhortation was very wonderful. When he spoke of the dangers of sensuality, the [disgusting] nature of the body, the fearsomeness of hell, and so forth, the listeners' minds came to full understanding. When he preached on bodily pleasure, he showed how sour is the mass of sorrow and suffering brought on thereby. When he preached on the meditation concerning the [disgusting nature] of the thirty-two parts of the body, he presented each part individually, showing the colour and origin of each. When he preached on the eight great hells, and the hells of beasts, hungry ghosts, and violent gods, he depicted them in such a way that the listeners were moved to great discomfort, quivering [in their seats].[10]

This reveals Paññānanda's preoccupation with the darker side of traditional Buddhism, a preoccupation he does not share with all hermitage monks (least of all Nyanatiloka). It is, however, deep-rooted in Buddhism and in Sinhalese culture: scenes of hell are frequently depicted in temple drawings, and the details on the thirty-two parts of the body are probably taken from the *Visuddhimagga*. Furthermore, preaching had great entertainment value in rural Ceylon—as it had in rural America—

[10] Ibid., p. 15.

nothing could be more thrilling than a fire-and-brimstone sermon.

Paññānanda's later accomplishments as a founder of hermitages and temples, and of a line of pupils, were partly based on this renown; but what set the seal on his last twenty-five years of accomplishment was his trip to Burma to receive a second higher ordination. The higher ordination—Pali *upasampadā*—is the monk's initiation into the full status of a monk, and is therefore his minimum qualification in his own eyes, and in the eyes of his colleagues and the rest of society. At best, it represents the monk's accession to his spiritual heritage as a descendant of the Buddha and of his own spiritual teachers. The monk is united with a line of pupillary succession which stretches back, unbroken, to the Buddha himself. Its psychological significance lies in the assumption of harmony and purity within the Sangha, which in turn fosters confidence. Furthermore, a proper higher ordination allows a monk to take part in official acts of the Sangha and propagate his own line of pupils.

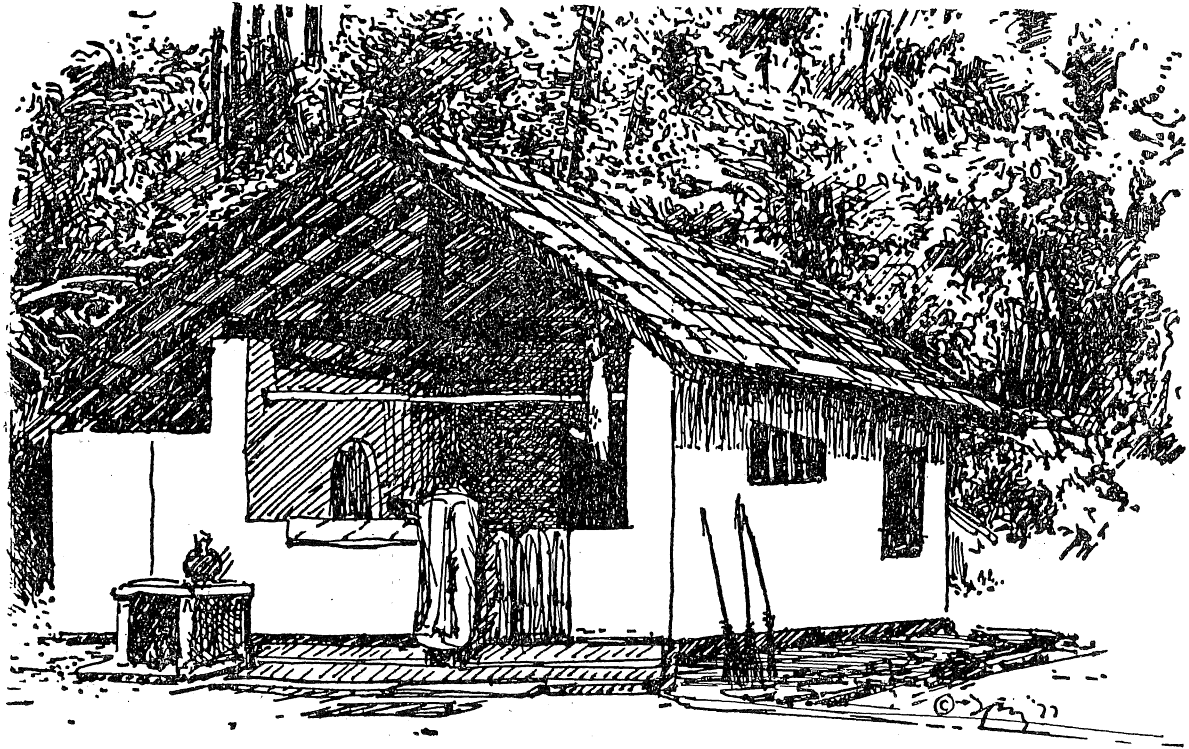
In 1851, however, at the instigation of one of Paññānanda's teachers, Lankāgoḍa Dhīrānanda, began a controversy over higher ordination which seriously threatened the harmony of the Amarapura monks. As Malalgoda has shown,[11] this controversy arose because the monks of one subcaste among the Salāgama caste wished to have a separate ordination centre, and it was caste feeling which fuelled the long and bitter fight over the issue. The substance of the controversy was as follows. One way of holding an ordination ceremony is to conduct it on a raft, a building on piles, or an island, surrounded by water. Though I was told that this is because such an installation has no owner, and is therefore free of ideas of property, I suspect it also has to do with the purifying effect of water. All boats, bridges and the like must be withdrawn to one side or the other of the boundary (*sīmā*) for the duration of the ceremony. The boundary is fixed by a monk throwing a bowlful of water out on each side. The controversy concerns a certain plank. The plank had been used to cross from a bridge to the chapter house, and had then been withdrawn. Lankāgoḍa asserted that it had not been withdrawn far enough, so that it impinged on the boun-

[11] Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society*, pp. 151–61.

dary, and on these grounds he maintained that the higher ordinations conferred on that fateful occasion in 1851 were not valid, and that those monks were not monks at all. By the time this exercise in frustration petered out twenty years later, it had drawn into it chief monks from as far away as Burma and Thailand, most of whom tried to calm the contestants and bring them to an amicable settlement.

Paññānanda was not directly embroiled in this controversy, but its irrelevance to the serious pursuit of the monastic life cannot but have struck him. Furthermore, since he would have had to perform ordinations of his own pupils, and conduct similar Sangha business with Lankāgoḍa and the other parties to the dispute, he probably had personal experience which brought him to deplore the quarrel. Another monk deplored it as well: Ambagahavattē, who had left the Siyam Nikāya in the midst of a controversy (in which he was a junior spectator) over an equally trivial problem. Now, finding himself again confronted with a trivial conflict masking social prejudices, he gathered together a party, went to Burma, and obtained his higher ordination from the unsullied source in the Rāmañña kingdom. As soon as Ambagahavattē returned, Paññānanda prepared to set out for Burma with his original teacher in the Amarapura Nikāya, Vitārannādeniyē Indasāra, and a group of Indasāra's pupils and pupils' pupils, some of whom were Paññānanda's fellow forest-dwellers. Indasāra's death delayed proceedings, but about a month later, in September 1862, the party left for Burma, returning with their new higher ordinations early the following year. Notably this trip was organized by Don Pilippu Vikramasiṃha Guṇasēkara Vidāna Āracci Mahatmayā. Upon his return Paññānanda went directly to Ambagahavattē and they determined to work together, teaching pupils and conferring the higher ordination. This was the beginning of what was to become Ceylon's third, smallest, and strictest *nikāya*, the Rāmañña Nikāya.

In the later history of the Rāmañña Nikāya, Paññānanda's pupils blended with the village monks around them, and by the 1940s only the two hermitages, Baṭuviṭa and Kirinda, preserved his specifically ascetic heritage. At the time of their



A hermit's hut. At Bațuvița.

founding, however, they were symptomatic of a vigorous expansion of the ascetic tradition for which Paññānanda was largely responsible, at least in his natal area. This expansion followed a pattern as typical today as it was then, and I shall describe it as revealing certain principles of the social and psychological organization of Theravāda.

A *nikāya* is a related group of monks, a 'family', in that all the members of a *nikāya* trace their spiritual ancestry back to one group of founders from whom the line of pupillary succession descends; and in this respect a *nikāya* has many of the characteristics of a unilineal descent group. It is not reproduced biologically, however, but socially, and it is the nature of this reproduction which distinguishes the Buddhist Sangha not only from descent groups but also from other *sangha*s in Indian civilization, such as the Jain *sangha*. For the ordination of a monk requires the participation of at least five—but customarily many more—fully ordained monks. It was for this reason that so many of Paññānanda's colleagues went to the Rāmañña kingdom to bring back the ordination tradition, which could thereby continue in Ceylon without recourse to Burma.

So a group of monks must co-operate ceremonially to replicate themselves. But, as I have pointed out, this group must also share a certain purity and harmony: this harmony is dependent in turn on common assumptions and therefore on a shared education and training. The founders of the Rāmañña Nikāya were inheritors of the broad stream of revived monastic learning conveyed through both the Siyam and Amarapura Nikāyas in the first half of the nineteenth century. Their pupils likewise received a broad training from more than one teacher. Consider this typical pupil's life, written by one of Paññānanda's later pupils.

I had become a novice with Nalagama Piyaratana. Paññānanda took me at the age of nine, gave me the name Ñāṇinda, and taught me to read and write. Then he sent me to . . . Koḍāgoḍa Paññāsekhara for a year, and then for six years to Ambagahavattē's seminary at Payāgala, where I learned Pali grammar, the *Visuddhimagga*, and other books. Then I went to stay at Ilukkäṭiyē Sudarśanārama, built by Don Pilippu Vikramasiṃha Guṇasēkara Vidāna Āracci Mahatmayā, where I lived with my venerable teacher Paññānanda.[12]

[12] Ñāṇindāsabha, *Caritaya*, privately published (Matara, n.d.).

There are a number of notable features here. First, the education itself is not esoteric, handed down in secret from teacher to pupil, but is the common and relatively accessible property of anyone who cares to learn Pali. (Indeed, many laymen became scholars, being taught in the traditional way in the monastery and then acting as teachers to monks.) Second, the education of the pupil is necessarily an affair of more than one teacher: this is in keeping with the principle of consensus which requires that a monk be ordained by at least five others. A consequence of this is that what is learned is visibly tested for the pupil by the teaching and behaviour of his different teachers in different circumstances, and it is this which makes the tradition supple and living. Third, the tradition thus handed on is explicitly learned, an affair of many years and a great deal of application. This emphasis on learning constitutes one of the factors supporting a successful forest-dwelling movement. And indeed the reputation for strictness of the whole Rāmañña Nikāya, whether composed of village- or forest-dwellers, was founded on its high educational standard.

But the reproduction of a group of monks and their tradition also depends upon the willingness of laymen to support them. Monks are prohibited by the monastic code from requesting help of any kind unless laymen place themselves formally at the monk's disposal as 'givers of what is allowed by rule' (Sinh. *käpakaru dāyakayō*). In the beginning, of course, such laymen may be relatives of the monk, so this requirement—which usually takes the form of laymen petitioning a monk to allow them to set up a temple for him (if in the village), or a forest hermitage (if in the nearby jungle)—may disguise an already formed unity of purpose.

As a monk's reputation expands, groups of villagers from much further afield may issue invitations to him, and the *nikāya* would then begin to spread through the countryside. One famous monk cannot live in all the places offered to him, but with his instructions and under his tutelage one of his pupils may well be accepted. Thus Ñāṇinda, after his ordination and some further training, was taken by Paññānanda to a new temple offered him by some laymen in their village, Gäṭamānna. Paññānanda presided over his installation, and returned to the forest. In his latter years Paññānanda was offered

a total of nine village temples, and six hermitages were built for him. He is said to have had five hundred pupils: he would simply have officiated at the ordination of most of them, and even those who had frequent contact with him, such as Ñāṇinda, were largely educated elsewhere.

Recruitment also depends on a monk's reputation. The same laymen who offer a monk material support may wish him to ordain their sons. The relatively early age of first ordination of many, such as Ñāṇinda, reflects a motive which may not be wholly that of the novice himself: a career in the Sangha is highly respected in village Ceylon, and parents may push a son to join. Nevertheless many of those who join in youth do so of their own volition with the blessings of their parents. And to youthful enthusiasm no career in the Sangha is more attractive than that of a venerated forest monk.

But if all this depends on reputation, reputation itself depends on another species of reproduction: the telling and re-telling of stories regarding a monk's ascetic and meditative accomplishments. Two principles seem to be observed in this process. First, as the story travels further, in space and time, it becomes more clearly illustrative of traditional values. It takes on a homiletic colouring. Second, such stories usually accrete around actual incidents.

Let me illustrate this with two stories told of Paññānanda today. Though I have no incontrovertible evidence that they were told of Paññānanda one hundred years ago, I have every reason to believe that they, or their like, must have been. For even today similarly persuasive tales of similar inaccuracy are told about living forest monks.

The first story is simply this: once, while Paññānanda was sitting in meditation in a pool in a small stream (to cool himself) Māra, the Buddhist Satan, caused two huge jewels to appear before him. As soon as it was clear that he would have nothing to do with them, the jewels disappeared.

The area around Baṭuviṭa hermitage where this was said to have occurred (I was shown the stream) is in fact mined for gems, so it is quite conceivable that Paññānanda encountered something which he took to be precious stones. Furthermore, if he did indeed come across them, he had every reason to leave the stones alone, for taking them would have meant breaking

the monastic code which prohibits theft (in this case, of a good belonging to the king, for it was in the forest reserved by the British government) upon pain of expulsion from the Sangha. But observe the legendary flavour of the narrative. Māra, that stock figure of Buddhist homily, appears to tempt the virtuous monk, and he offers not one, but two huge jewels. Then, far from simply being covered by the sands of the stream bottom, these fruits of temptation suddenly disappear. This perhaps very simple and not, from the monks' point of view, terribly remarkable tale has been wrapped in the elements of Buddhist moral narrative and passed from hand to hand.

The second story is this. Sometimes, when Paññānanda went out in the early morning to pace back and forth on his meditation walkway (*sakman maḷu*), a leopard would be stretched out dozing on the sand. Paññānanda would then shoo the leopard away and calmly begin his meditation.

This may seem an unlikely story, but I have seen monks deal in a similarly firm way with both wild boar and elephants, so I have no hesitation in accepting the tale as fundamentally true, and not very strange in the life of a monk in the jungle. But to a villager who goes in mortal terror of the forest animals, it is quite a different matter. The very separation of the monk's life from village experience renders such a tale, however true, worthy of endless repetition. It has its legendary resonances as well: in just such wise did the Buddha deal with a rampaging elephant.

To explain these tales, however, is not to explain away the fact that such monks do indeed act in ways that faithfully reproduce tradition, quite apart from any embroidered narrative of such acts. How do monks come to handle wild animals? How do they manage to avoid the fascination of precious stones? And how is it that Paññānanda left the home life of his village temple at about the same age that the Buddha left for the forest, and returned seven or eight years later, as the Buddha did, to preach and teach? I think the answer lies in the homiletic stories which they hear as children, preach as monks, and—this is the important point—continually tell themselves.

This is naturally a difficult process to follow, and in its nature any description of it must be largely speculative. There are, however, grounds on which to begin. In summarizing some

recent research on dreaming, Liam Hudson points out that we can differentiate between two kinds of dream. The one is 'primary visual experience', which consists of disconnected and incoherent visual images. The other is 'secondary cognitive elaboration', the dream narration of a coherent story. It seems plausible that these stories are woven around the images of primary visual experience, making what is bizarre and unassimilable more reasonable and manageable.

Hudson then extends his argument:

The easy, reflex-like part of our thinking, the thinking we do without thinking about it, consists in the translation of our experience to narrative, irrespective of whether our experience fits the narrative form or not . . . . Asleep and awake it is just the same: we are telling ourselves stories all the time.[13]

The key, he goes on to write, is that this narrative disposition is not merely passive, but active: in so far as it enables human beings to make sense of experience, it also enables them to guide themselves, to choose policies, to decide on their next move.

If this narrative disposition is as profound as Hudson proposes we could ideally seek evidence for its action in dreams. Indeed we should also expect that such effective narration would take a culturally determined form. And I think we do find such a process in a dream recorded by the monk Ñāṇānanda (of Chapter 9, below) in his diary. At the time of the dream he was actively engaged in reviving the forest-dwelling way of life, and was searching eagerly for caves in the forest (an enthusiasm which has never left him). Aside from any practical use, of course, caves are the very badge and emblem of the forest-dweller. This is the dream as recorded:

I saw a boulder rolling down a hillside. Suddenly it stopped on top of two other rocks. I thought: that would make a nice cave to meditate in. Then I woke up.

This is, of course, only a fragment of a story which was interrupted by Ñāṇānanda's waking, but it does have the characteristics to which Hudson refers: the sudden turning of an image, the rolling boulder, in itself arbitrary and disconnected, into an intelligible and narratively useful piece of plot. Indeed Ñāṇā-

[13] 'Viewpoint', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 25 January 1980, p. 85.

nanda must have so regarded it, for he was in the habit of recording dreams which he thought morally significant.[14] Here, I suggest, we have actually caught Ñāṇānanda in the act of beginning to tell himself a story.

But some dreams are complete stories in themselves, with far greater significance, like the following one from Paññānanda's biography. It is a tale whose form, as we shall see in the next chapter, is absolutely typical of Buddhist folk literature, and which has a message no less direct than such a tale would have when embedded in a sermon to the unsophisticated laity:

One day when he was very ill the venerable monk [Paññānanda], unable to meditate into the night, lay down to give his body some rest, and saw the following dream. A figure, adorned in white, ornamented, with the aspect of one more than human, came down from a large sala tree near the monk's residence. The figure came before the venerable monk, recited a poem to him, turned and left. Waking at the end of the dream, the venerable monk wrote the poem on a slate and went back to sleep. In the morning he showed it to the others. This was the verse:

> Regarding your way as 'upright'
> Positively jump up and run far swiftly.
> Reciting and taking to heart the lovely Buddha-word
> Uproot sloth, go to the forest.[15]

Let me take the dream in itself first. The appearance of the figure is precisely that of a deity as conceived in Sinhalese thought and iconography, and there is no doubt that it is taken as such. The deity's act is also typical: gods, as we shall see in the next chapter, frequently appear in Sinhalese folk literature to deliver some moralizing message or other. The key matter to understand, though, is that this is not simply the irruption of the sacred into Paññānanda's profane world, as a sign of grace conferred by the All-Powerful above. On the contrary, the gods in Buddhism have a strictly limited role. They are divine stage-

[14] See my 'Hell-fire and Urinal Stones: An Essay in Buddhist Purity and Authority', in *Contributions to South Asian Studies*, Vol. II, ed. Gopal Krishna, Oxford University Press (New Delhi, 1982).

[15] Iňdurā kiyā äti säṭi salakan numbaṭa
Iňdurā päna duvapan hanikayi duraṭa
Soňdurā budu vadan maturā menehi koṭa
Udurā damā nandiya palayan kälaṭa.
From Upasena, op. cit., p. 20.

hands who shuffle sets around in order to assist the real spiritual drama, which takes place wholly on the human stage: the drama of moral development and perseverance.[16]

And indeed the dream cannot be far from the sort of story that Paññānanda told himself constantly. It is the sleeping expression of a compelling rededication which, faced with the lonely difficulties of the forest life, he must have always sought while awake. It is precisely the sort of story which would enable him 'to complete one stride and initiate the next'; to carry out, for example, the *dhutangas*, and to meditate deep into the night. In other words, not only did Paññānanda 'translate his experience into narrative', he also translated his narrative into experience. This is how his life came to take on so many suggestive resemblances to the legends which so gripped him. Furthermore, having so much hagiography about him to begin with, he easily became the stuff of hagiography himself: what we might call 'tertiary narrative reproduction', the stories about him that spread and were preserved.

Paññānanda died as he had lived. The precedent is found in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, a moving and circumstantial account of the mindful, self-possessed death of the Buddha, predicted by himself beforehand. And Nyanatiloka also told his pupil Nyanaponika, shortly before his death at age seventy-nine, that he would not live to his eightieth year. Here is the biographer's account of Paññānanda's death:

It seems that three days before his death, his reverence (Paññānanda) saw a dream. This is the dream: 'A certain person with a splendid, beautiful body came through the sky in a gold chariot. Leaving the chariot in the sky, he came down to earth, came before his reverence, bowed, and said, "So that's enough time for your reverence here. Please come." Then he got back in his chariot and left.' Three days after seeing this dream, at 7 o'clock in the morning of 26 December 1887, his reverence proceeded to the temple for worship, threw out the old flowers, offered new ones, worshipped the Buddha, confessed his faults, advised the other monks [all as usual], and returned to his

[16] Buddhist dream analysis furthermore suggests that significant or portentous dreams come only to those who are virtuous and mindful. I believe the *locus classicus* for this is *Milindapañho*, pp. 297–302. This is further elaborated in the *Saddharmaratnākaraya* of Dhammadinnācārya Vimalakīrti, ed. Kalapaduvāvē Devānanda (Colombo, 1955), pp. 426–46. For the Buddha's portentous dreams see *Anguttara Nikaya*, III. CXCVI.

dwelling to sit in a chair on the porch. Next he took some medicine . . . that was mixed for him, on account of a difficulty in the airy humours which had arisen a few days before. When he had drunk the medicine, he washed his face and retired within his room, took the horizontal position, and began to meditate. The monk who was serving him, upon returning with the spittoon which he had gone to wash out, remembered the injunction his reverence had given: 'In my last hours, don't give me any medicine, don't gather around me chattering, and don't tell anyone I'm dying.' So the monk remained silent on the porch, watching. Then, fully recollected, meditating, the elder Paññānanda passed away.[17]

[17] Upasena, op. cit., pp. 27–8.

CHAPTER 5

The Asceticism of the Legends

The stories that so dominated Paññānanda's imagination are the Jātaka tales. The Jātakas are at once older than the Pali canon, and the basic substance of sermons in modern Ceylon; they are preserved in Pali,[1] but form the basic matter of most of Sinhalese literature; and they have been woven into the daily life of the Sinhalese, through sermons, poetry, art and music, for more than two thousand years. There is no civilization more unitary or archaic than the Buddhist Sinhalese, and the very soul and substance of that unity are the Jātakas.[2]

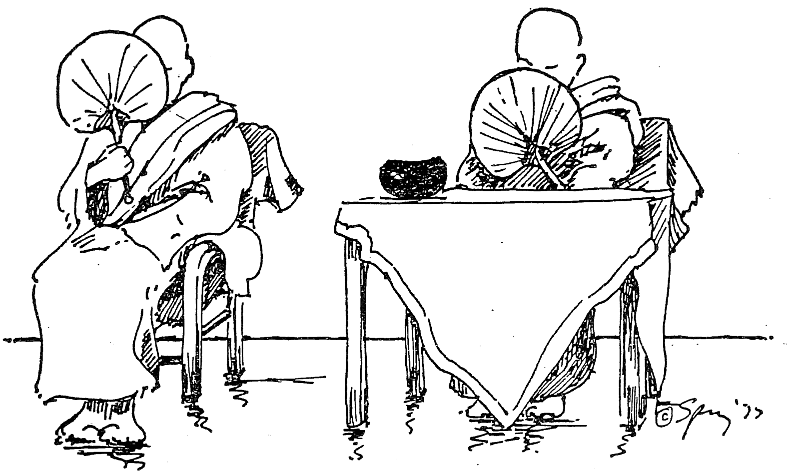
In this chapter I will describe the form of the Jātakas, and explain how they weld the other-worldly values of asceticism and the this-worldly values of the family into a persuasive whole. I will then recount the tale that led to Paññānanda's renunciation, and discuss how it views asceticism. It will be seen that there is a difference between the asceticism of the *Visuddhimagga* and that of the Jātakas, though it is quite possible for them to coexist, as they did in Paññānanda. In one the forest life is seen from close on, in practical detail; in the other it is seen from afar. The *Visuddhimagga* is for forest monks, the Jātakas for them and everyone else as well. But, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, if the Jātaka version is practised without the professional detail of the *Visuddhimagga* and the canon, quite a different way of life results.

Of the more than 550 Jātaka stories, some are animal stories similar to, or even directly related to, those of Aesop's *Fables*; others are tales of shrewd or stupid merchants, wise or cruel

[1] The oldest source we have for the Jātakas is the Pali canon, where the verses associated with the tales appear, but not the tales themselves (some of which do however appear in the *Cariyapiṭaka* of the canon). These were kept in Sinhalese, and were not translated into Pali until about the time of Buddhaghosa.

[2] I herewith sidestep the vexing idea of the Great and Little Traditions, which has also been sidestepped by Gombrich in *Precept and Practice*. Gananath Obeyesekere, however, has met the issue head on, to good effect, in 'The Great Tradition and the Little in the Perspective of Sinhalese Buddhism', *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XXII, No. 2, 1963.

kings, unfaithful or virtuous wives, proud Brahmans and saucy beggars; while yet others concern ascetics and wandering monks, not all of them saintly. This unruly collection of moral tales is brought under the Buddhist aegis by a frame story which identifies one key character in each Jātaka as a previous incarnation of the Buddha, and goes on to identify other characters as previous incarnations of his family, disciples, acquaintances, or enemies. The Jātakas as a whole are consummated by a legendary biography of the Buddha, and there is even some small effort in the frame stories to show how the events of one Jātaka influence those of another: hence, though each Jātaka tale retains its individual autonomy as a complete story, the whole is a loosely-structured epic cycle recounting the fate, over a span of eons, of the protagonist who was to be our Buddha.



Monk preaching. The monk at the table is preaching. The fan is kept before the face for modesty's sake. At Vaturuvila.

What unifies this epic cycle is not, however, any development in the plot, but rather the central idea that in each birth the Buddha-to-be—the Bodhisattva—is struggling to develop one of the Ten Perfections (Pali *dasa parami*, Sinh. *daśa paramitā*). These are moral virtues: generosity, good behaviour, renunciation, wisdom, energy, long-suffering, truthfulness, resolution, loving-kindness, and equanimity.[3] This list, which appears late

[3] Pali *dāna, sīla, nekkhamma, paññā, viriya, khanti, sacca, adhiṭṭhāna, mettā, upekkhā.*

in the canon, does not have the compelling internal consistency which other numbered lists have; rather, it is a mnemonic list for the use of preachers; and in fact what historical development we can surmise in the Jātakas is toward a form simplified for homiletic purposes. In the Jātakas, then, the Sinhalese preachers had a huge arsenal of colourful stories designed to illustrate particular moral points, and each of these stories was set against a vast background of the eons-long struggle of one being for moral perfection.

This struggle for perfection by the Bodhisattva in the Jātaka cycle is cast so that the dearest and most common desires of the flesh and family life are called up to bear witness to the heroism of sacrifice and renunciation. If your own wife and child are dear to you, say the Jātakas, how much more precious must it be to renounce them? And if your own flesh is dear to you, how much more precious must it be to sacrifice it? Hence, through the countless births, the Bodhisattva sacrificed a mountain of flesh, an ocean of blood, as the Jātaka poets are fond of saying; while the woman who was his wife in so many births, and whom he left in his last birth to become the Buddha, wept an ocean of tears for him. The Sinhalese audience, of whatever condition or sex, can therefore identify with underlying Buddhist morality because the emotional charge inherent in worldly life animates the (more noble) values of renunciation.

Given this fundamental strategy, however, the Jātakas and their various interpretations may play the theme of renunciation differently.[4] It is quite possible, for example, to use the supreme status accorded the Buddha and his wilful renunciation to cast a glorious, if melancholy, light on family life itself; it is possible, that is, to produce a poem for Buddhist mothers which in fact confirms them in their sentimental attachment to the world.

Just such a tack was taken by the anonymous author of the seventeenth- or eighteenth-century poem, *Yasōdarāvata*. *Yasō-*

[4] The formulaic presentation of the Buddha's renunciation in the older part of the Pali canon does not take place against the background of the Jātaka cycle—that is, in consciousness of previous births. Rather, the Bodhisattva, leading a life of worldly pleasure, comes face to face with examples of disease, death, and old age; and a monk. He is so deeply moved by these sights—by their immediate relevance, so to say—that he renounces the world, like the monk, to seek emancipation from this woeful prospect.

darāvata means 'the Life of Yasōdarā', who, in the Bodhisattva's last birth, was the woman who had been his wife over the eons. The poem touches on most of the features of the Bodhisattva's life—in its legendary form as part of the Jātaka cycle, that is—and emphasizes particularly Yasōdarā's lament when she discovers that the Bodhisattva has left his kingdom, and her, to become the Buddha. Here I translate only the section in which the Bodhisattva, after ordering his horse to be saddled, returns and stands in the doorway to gaze one last time upon his sleeping wife and their new-born child. It is a scene sometimes depicted in temple wall painting. The poet dwells lovingly on the tableau:

43. With his holy hand on the lintel
His holy foot on the threshold
The way she was sleeping like the moon
on the bed!
(He turned away without looking back)

44. Reposing on a bed of a cartload of flowers
The breasts full of milk
Yasōdarā, without fault, the meritorious — He remembers
'But she is an obstacle to me becoming the — his purpose
Buddha'

45. Seven fathom-long coils of blue-black hair
His head spun around the coils of hair
The way the child sucked at the breast!
Seeing the breasts, so hard to renounce

46. 'I came to be Buddha, all perfections fulfilled
I sacrificed so many beings to be Buddha — His own flesh
Like the moon, this chief of all women . . . — He is touched
If I called my queen now . . .' — by longing

47. The queen sleeping on the golden bed
'If I came closer to see the infant . . .'
Her hand on the princeling like a golden creeper
He saw how the queen was sleeping

48. The prince sucking at the breast, casket of jewels
Is any other scene so touching?
'They lived with me, doing nothing hurtful'
He hardened his heart, his eyes filled with tears

49. 'She has wept more than an ocean for me
Is there a more devoted wife in the world today?
Right now I'm leaving for Buddhahood — His final resolve
Of one mind, to destroy my impurities, I leave'

50. 'To spend the time here because of one woman,
one child?
Or to carry beings without end across *saṃsāra*'s
ocean?
Today I become a monk and leave love behind!
What a beautiful infant is my son Rāhula!' — An afterthought

The economy with which the poet places this last renunciation in the light of all those that have gone before bespeaks not only his own skill (and he is very good indeed), but also the readiness with which both he and his audience refer to the vast legendary Jātaka background. One is reminded of Greek tragedy, especially in the use of ellipsis and the audience's foreknowledge to produce effects. The art lies not in creating the novel, but rather in manipulating the totally familiar to produce a totally familiar emotion which is prized for its poignancy. The difficulty and inherent loss of renunciation are there, of course, but the renunciation is very nearly erotic: and in any case here peasant family values coexist happily with the perspective of asceticism. This resounding harmony between the two value systems is the crown and culmination of Buddhism's evolution from a way of life and thinking for world-renouncers into the religion of a peasant people.

The Temiya Jātaka, which inspired Paññānanda to become a monk, exploits a more sombre and more plainly ascetic view of renunciation. I will now recount the Jātaka[5] as told in the *Pansiya Paṇas Jātaka Pota* ('Book of the 550 Jātakas'), a fourteenth-century Sinhalese translation from the Pali, written in admirably clear and simple language. It has probably been the main source for preachers and poets since its composition. Note how asceticism and renunciation—the taking of special vows, the voluntary submission to pain, the leaving of the pleasures of the world—appear over and over again, layer upon

[5] *Pansiya Paṇas Jātaka Pota*, Kāṇḍa 6–10, M. D. Gunasena and Co. (Colombo, 1969), pp. 1335–54.

layer, repeating the message of the deity in Paññānanda's dream: uproot sloth, go to the forest. And indeed the story so perfectly epitomizes the Buddhist view that, as Sarkisyanz[6] has pointed out, it has also been used as an admonition directed at kings.

Like all Jātakas, the Temiya was a sermon preached by the Buddha to his monks. A group of monks, it seems, had gathered one afternoon to discuss the Buddha's Great Renunciation (*mahābhinikmana*), his leaving of Yasōdarā and the kingship of the Sakyas. The Buddha himself approached, and asked what they were discussing; when told, he observed that this was not the only time he had renounced the pleasures of kingship, and related the following.

Once upon a time, when Kasi was king in Benares, there were 16,000 women in his royal harem, but not one had borne him an heir. The city-dwellers, distressed by the prospect of having no one to protect them in the future—for that is the role of the Indian king—presented a petition to him. The king thereupon instructed his wives to vow, on the basis of their strenuously maintained virtue, that if they remained unsullied, they might conceive. And Candra Devi, the chief queen, undertook special precepts. These were no more than those taken by an ordinary Buddhist layman on full moon days, but for the delicately nurtured royal stock of Benares, they were fierce asceticism. The energy of all these exertions affected the seat of Śakra, king of the gods, which began to glow with heat.

Ascertaining the source of his discomfort, Śakra cast about for a being to be born as the king's son. At this time the Bodhisattva was about to pass away from one of the Buddhist heavens, to which he had come from the Osupat hell, where he had 'cooked' (Sinh. *päsi*) for 80,000 years; and he had found himself in hell after reigning in Benares for 20,000 years, where he had meted out fair but cruel, and therefore demeritorious, justice to criminals.

Śakra went to the Bodhisattva and convinced him to take his next birth as a human being. As a human being, said Śakra, he could fulfil his perfections and be of service to people as well. The Bodhisattva duly entered the womb of Candra Devi and

[6] Sarkisyanz, E., *Buddhist Backgrounds of the Burmese Revolution*, Martinus Nijhoff (The Hague, 1965).

was born, along with 500 other gods who passed away and were born to the wives of the 500 ministers of King Kasi. When the king saw his son, 'fatherly love pierced his skin and flesh to strike in his very marrow'. The king granted Candra Devi a boon, which she reserved for later. Brahmans prophesied that the child had the ability and fortune to rule the four continents if he wished. The city rejoiced. Prince Temiya had all the world could offer.

But immediately matters took a serious turn. While lying on his loving father's lap, the infant witnessed four criminals brought before his father for judgement. One was sentenced to ten lashes; another to prison; the third to have his hands and feet cut off; and the fourth to be impaled. The prince shivered with fear, thinking of the hell to which his father would be consigned by the demerit of these deeds.

Nor was the fear to be only for his father. The next day, upon waking, Temiya saw a vision of his own past births. He realized that he had been in hell, and would return there if he followed in his father's footsteps. He shook with greater fear. 'How, oh how, shall I escape this cruel prison', he cried to himself.

But help was not far away. A female deity suddenly appeared, and consoled the Bodhisattva with the following plan. He could, she said, put on an act; he could appear to be deaf, dumb, lame, and senseless. Then he could never be king, and they would eject him from the city as an inauspicious wretch. Once in the forest he could become an ascetic and continue perfecting himself.

He put the plan into effect immediately. At feeding time he did not cry for milk. Learned Brahmans suggested they test him by withholding milk for one or two feedings. In the event they withheld it for a year, while his mother fed him secretly. He remained as silent as a stone. The next year they tried tempting him with cookies and cakes. But while the 500 infants born with him fought lustily for the sweets, he remained oblivious, thinking, 'Which do you prefer, the torments of hell or these sweets?'

He spent his whole childhood facing one test after the next. In his fifth year he and the others were placed in a house which was set on fire. They scattered screaming, but he lay 'like one attained to the meditative state of cessation', thinking that it were better to cook in these flames than in hell. One year they

covered him with treacle and set ants and flies on him, but he bore up resolutely. In his fourteenth year, judging that he had come to the age which prizes cleanliness, they left him lying in his own ordure until it turned the stomachs of those a league away. They reproached him, saying he had no shame, but he thought of the Amedhya hell, where filth lies for a hundred leagues around, and persevered. The following year they put coals in his bed until his skin blistered, with no result.

Near the end of their tether, the Bodhisattva's mother and father spent a year taking turns shaming and pleading with him, in vain. Finally, in his sixteenth year, they set him in a perfumed chamber on a luxurious bed, and sent dancing girls like the handmaidens of the gods to work their charms on his now ripening manhood. 'Prince Temiya, being intelligent, saw how the women thought to try him in various ways, so, willing that his body feel no touch of pleasure, he lay stiff as a corpse.' His parents saw that there was nothing to do with him.

So the king called in the Brahmans, who told him that, so long as the flawed Temiya remained in the palace, his inauspicious presence was a danger to the throne and kingdom. He should be taken to the forest and buried. Candra Devi now demanded her boon: that her son be placed on the throne. The king refused, but then allowed it for seven days. Temiya was dressed up as king and placed, dumb and unprotesting, on the throne. For six days his mother pleaded with him, but to no avail. On the seventh day the king ordered his charioteer to load Temiya on a hearse and take him out to bury him. The Bodhisattva nearly faltered, fearing that his mother's heart would burst with grief, but the thought that sixteen years of suffering would thereby be lost spurred him on. As the hearse bore him from the palace its wheel struck against the sill of the palace gate: 'At this sound the prince grew very pleased at the success of his plan.'

His suffering bore rich fruit. The charioteer stopped by a flowering grove some leagues from the city and went to dig the grave. When he had gone the prince sat up and stretched his limbs. He found he had the strength to walk 400 leagues a day, and to shake the chariot about like a toy. Śakra, the king of the gods, sent down a proper divine suit of clothes, and Temiya dressed and went off to address the charioteer. So eloquent and

sweet was his sermon that he held the charioteer completely in thrall. Temiya explained that it was now his pleasure to become an ascetic, a *tāpasayā*, and live in the forest: for the things of this world are so uncertain, evanescent, and painful. The charioteer determined to join him in the forest life, but the Bodhisattva extracted a promise that he would first fetch the king.

When the king heard the news he ordered up a great procession, gathered up the instruments to consecrate Temiya king, and set out for the forest. In the meanwhile Śakra had ordered Visvakarman, the divine handyman, to create a proper forest retreat for the Bodhisattva, complete with a flower pond, a place to sleep, a place to meditate during the day, a meditation walkway, and fruit trees. He also provided the Bodhisattva with the accoutrements of the *tāpasa* (ascetic) life: a cloak, a skin to sit on, sandals, and a staff. The Bodhisattva put these on, bound his hair up, and began walking back and forth on his meditation walkway, saying to himself, 'very comfortable, very nice'. Then he sat down to meditate, and quickly attained the various states of meditative consciousness and supernatural knowledge. Finally, he gathered some leaves from the *kara* tree, cooked them without salt, ate them, and then abode intent upon loving-kindness, sympathetic joy, compassion, and equanimity, a perfect *tāpasayā*. Thus the king found him.

In contrast to the vegetable he had been when the king had last seen him, Temiya behaved with tremendous dignity and intelligence, addressing the king with a series of questions which demonstrated his thorough knowledge of polity. Nor was the encounter without sentiment: when Candra Devi arrived, she flung herself at her son's feet to worship him, the holy *tāpasayā*, and covered his feet with her tears. When she and the women saw the leaves that formed the Bodhisattva's diet, 'They sat worshipping him and scolding, saying, "Is this the sort of lowly food you eat, venerable sir?" and (alas) "You live a hard life".'

When his father asked him to return to be anointed king, the Bodhisattva replied with a powerful sermon, whose burden was that, since human life is such a poor and passing thing, 'like the perishing of fish in a mud puddle dried up by the sun', what use are the vanities of worldly life? First the king was so convinced that he decided to become a *tāpasayā* himself, leaving the city to

Temiya. But Temiya was not interested. He preached on to the climax: 'O king, people who live hoping greedily for wealth have no regard for their own lives. Those like myself are free from the bonds of wealth. O great king, come live with me and be free of those bonds. Your crown is of no use to me!'

Thereupon the king, the queen, the 16,000 women of the harem, and all the ministers decided to become *tāpasayō*. The king returned briefly to the city, threw open the doors of the strongrooms, and announced to the city that treasure was there for the taking. The city-dwellers, however, joined the king and returned with him to become ascetics.

Meanwhile Śakra prepared the hermitage to accommodate the newcomers. The women, naturally fearful of the jungle, were placed in the middle, surrounded by the men. Visvakarman provided fruit trees for their nourishment, and thus they lived, observing moral discipline. And, one by one, three further kings with their armies, who had come for plunder, were intercepted by the Bodhisattva and converted. They too settled in the forest. Their horses and elephants returned to the wild, their chariots rusted where they stood, and the gold of their treasuries was strewn as sand on the ground of the hermitage.

All the vows, renunciation, and voluntary suffering of this tale are summarized in the single word, *tapas*. The root of the word (Skt. *tap*) refers in its concrete sense to heating, burning, consuming by fire. This set of meanings is closely allied with a second, however, which have to do with tormenting, suffering, and penitence. In the Indian cultural realm—I should really write, in the Indian climate—heat is very closely associated with suffering. In the works we have before us, similarly, this metaphor figures prominently: Yasōdarā, in the lament which follows the flight of the Bodhisattva to homelessness, refers repeatedly to the heat of her sorrow, the flames of her torment, and so forth; while Prince Temiya received his name because his birth wetted—*temunā*—the minds of the populace, therefore cooling them and alleviating the heat of their suffering. The connection between the ideas of heat, suffering, and mental suffering is very lively and conscious.

This complex of images is further amplified by a specifically

religious application: extreme austerities, self-torment, performed for religious or magical purposes. Of the many different practices associated with *tapas* in ancient India, the one that most vividly embodies its metaphorical connection with heat is that of sitting in the noonday sun between four raging bonfires. In this sense *tapas* is ubiquitous in Sanskrit literature. It confers power on villains as well as sages—it is often difficult to tell them apart—the amount of power gained varying directly with the duration and severity of the penance. In this context *tapas* has no particular spiritual or moral dimension.

It was, however, also a very lively idea among the seekers for spiritual salvation with whom the historical Buddha lived before his enlightenment, and in this context is increasingly associated with both the spiritual and the moral; spiritual, in the sense that it was widely viewed as a technique conducive to salvation; and moral, in that *tapas* involves restraint or self-control, restraint that ultimately issues, with Buddhism, in the all-important restraint of the senses (Pali *indriyasaṃvara*).

The Buddha himself undertook penance—in his case, starvation—but finally rejected it firmly and proclaimed in his first sermon that his was the middle path between extremes of sensual indulgence and physical self-torment. Elsewhere he affirms this in no uncertain terms, directing blame not only to self-tormenting ascetics but especially to his rivals, the Jains.[7] The grounds for this position, aside from his own experience, lay in his radical insistence on intelligent self-control and controlled intelligence, rather than in the application of mechanical means to an automatically assured end, which is what *tapas* remains as long as it retains its roots in magic.

The Buddha censured *tapas* as such, yes: but the idea was so all-pervasive that it found its way into his speech, and that of his successors, though altered in a way consistent with the genius of the Buddha. We find the word used in various places in the canon and commentaries as a synonym for such ideas as *brahmacariya* and *saṃvara* or *indriyasaṃvara*, that is to say, the disciplined religious life and moral restraint or restraint of the senses. Here the Buddha lifts a religious word in common usage out of its still magical/mechanical background and transposes it

[7] In the canon the Buddha was also compelled to answer the counter-charge, that he and his monks lived too easily.

to a context in which its meaning is purely moral and spiritual. He did this in other instances as well—notably in the transposition of the word *brahmaṇa* (Brahman) from its context of ritual purity and social distinction into a designation for those of superior accomplishment in the life of moral discipline. If a Brahman (*brahmaṇa*) were someone whom a monk or Buddhist convert respected originally for reasons arising unconsciously from his cultural milieu, then he would transfer that respect to a Brahman defined by moral purity; only that respect would be purified of its original unexamined connotations both by being wrenched out of its context, and by a lucid explanation from the Buddha. Similarly—though not so carefully or explicitly—*tapas* was redefined to indicate the distinctive life of reasoned moral self-discipline in Buddhism.

But it was never possible to rid *tapas* of its primeval association with torment and laudable self-mortification. In the first instance, this is because the idea embodies a very deep-seated and pervasive way of visualizing certain emotions—sorrow, the pain of renunciation; and certain spiritual action—self-purification. And in the case of Buddhism at least, *tapas* is all the more persuasive for being neither critically examined nor philosophically elaborated. It remains at the level of a poetic or mythic formulation of spiritual activity, and though shorn of its connection with the more spectacular self-tortures found in the broader Indian scene, it is nevertheless felt to be powerful and efficacious in its own right. Hence, for example, there is a *tapōvana* (*tapas* grove) monastery in early medieval Anurādhapura; while closer to home, we find Paññānanda designating his Kirinda hermitage as a *tāpasārāma* (monastery for *tāpasayō*), and himself and his fellows as *tāpasa* monks. That it is not the name alone which carries the charge, we realize when we consider that Paññānanda practised, at one time or another, all of the *dhutāngas*. Some of these, such as the one in which the monk never lies down, are very near the original *tapas* indeed; and in any case, to practise all of them argues a certain fascination with the idea of the *dhutāngas* (and by extension with *tapas*) rather than with their practical purposes alone.

The Temiya Jātaka exploits the idea of *tapas* in at least three distinct ways. At the beginning of the story the vows taken by Candra Devi and the rest of the harem, mild as they seem,

nevertheless produce enough heat to discomfit Śakra, who is compelled to get off his seat and do something about it. The gods help those who are strenuously and visibly good; and this conviction animates a good deal of the Buddhism of Theravāda countries, whether that of laymen or, like Paññānanda, monks.

The real poignancy and force of the story, however, lie in the second way of exploiting *tapas*, the implicit *tapas* of the baby Bodhisattva's trials. The constant reminder of hell gives the Bodhisattva's persistence in tribulation its motivation in reasoned self-interest, which is a Buddhist theme *par excellence.* As William James writes of Christian self-mortification, 'The devotee may feel that he is buying himself free, or escaping worse suffering hereafter, by doing penance now.' The credibility of this as a motive in literature and life is confirmed in many ways in Sinhalese culture, not least by hearty depictions of infernal torments on the walls of temples.

But it is not reasoned self-interest alone which is emulable in the baby Bodhisattva. The great elaboration of the trials—they are far more meticulously described than I have revealed—displays another virtue. This is Sinhalese *vīryaya* (= Pali *viriya*, Skt. *vīrya*), cognate to both 'virtue' and 'virility'. Commonly in Buddhist parlance the word refers to energy or exertion, and with this meaning it appears in the list of the Ten Perfections and others. Its primary meaning, however, with which it retains a vital connection, is manliness, heroism, the state of being a hero. It is predominantly with this meaning that *vīryaya* is used in the Temiya. Thus the Bodhisattva, having been told that he will be taken out on the morrow and buried, thinks to himself, 'Behold, Temiya, the sixteen years of heroism performed by you is a success.' This largely passive moral heroism is precisely the virtue the Temiya Jātaka seeks to promote, and it is the radiance of such heroism which suffuses so much of Sinhalese literature.

The ideas of moral heroism and helpworthiness by the divine come together in the third, the explicit, *tapas* of the forest. The costume—bound hair, leopard skin, staff—evoke the Indian background, as does its setting in the forest and the notion of eating the fruit and leaves from the trees. Otherwise it is Buddhist: the meditative attainments, the meditation walkway, and the idea of moral discipline rather than strenuous self-

mortification. On the one hand, it is assumed that this discipline is so far from the lay estate that it is something effectively as powerful as self-mortification itself, and therefore the state of the Buddhist *tāpasayā* is glorified. On the other hand, the paraphernalia of the Buddhist *tāpasayā*, identifying him with the un-Buddhist untamed tamer of the self in the forest of Hinduism, lends moral discipline its persuasive force and nearly supernatural attractiveness. Having established this contrast with the lay life, the poet can then go on to explore the difference. We learn in the Temiya, for example, that the forest life is carefree; that even leaves boiled without salt taste like ambrosia; and that the skin therefore glows with health. And the gods are always willing to lend a hand around the place. Furthermore, having once reached this enviable state, one can enjoy the beauties of the forest fearlessly, unlike the quaking layman.

This blessed existence is depicted on temple walls as frequently as the torments of hell, and holds as firm a place in the Sinhalese imagination. Note, however, that it is a state as vague as it is entrancing. Unlike the monk, the Jātaka *tāpasayā* has no detailed monastic code, no canon, no connection with an already established line of pupillary succession. What would happen if one attempted to follow an ascetic life on this model alone?

CHAPTER 6

The Legends in Practice: I. Asceticism in the Village Temple

The first Buddhist *tāpasayā* of modern times was Subodhānanda, who, in 1898, left a temple of the Siyam Nikāya near Colombo which he had inherited as a fully ordained monk, renounced his robes, and took ordination at his own hands as a Buddhist ascetic. This is a remarkable step for two reasons. First, there was, so far as I have been able to determine, no precedent in Subodhānanda's social milieu for the role he envisioned for himself, nor for the act of self-ordination.[1] And second, he took this step in the face of determined, sometimes fierce, opposition from the established monks of his circle. The Buddhist *tāpasayō* of today, and the movement of self-ordained ascetics in the early 1950s, stem ultimately from his precedent. His evocation of the Jātaka ideal touched a deep and lasting chord in Sinhalese culture.

In some ways, however, as I shall argue, this was not nearly as revolutionary as it might at first have appeared. For the consequence of this was the setting up of more village temples (*pansal*; sing. *pansala*), in themselves and in the beliefs and practices of their monks not startlingly different from those around them. In this broader perspective, asceticism and reform are merely an idiom through which dissent and segmentation are expressed in the Sangha.[2]

Subodhānanda was born in 1870, and received his higher ordination at Kotte in 1890—we may reasonably speculate that he followed the usual procedure of becoming a novice in his early teens, in order to spend his life in robes.[3] His first teacher, from whom he expected to inherit the incumbency of a temple,

[1] See Carrithers, 'The Modern Ascetics of Lanka and the Pattern of Change in Buddhism', *Man*, Vol. XIV, 1979, p. 308, n. 3.

[2] Ibid., pp. 296–7.

[3] Most of Subodhānanda's life history I gathered from one Ariyānanda, who became his pupil in 1956. It is not therefore a very detailed life history, but one which has proven accurate in every detail I have been able to check.

was Piṭipāna Nāyaka ('the chief monk from Piṭipāna'), but Piṭipāna died, and the temples at his disposal went to other pupils. Subodhānanda was taken over by a close associate of Piṭipāna, however, one Porē Sobhita Nāyaka, who eventually gave one of the forty temples at his disposal to Subodhānanda. That was the Nandanārāmaya at Ānāsiwatte near Talaṃgama. Thus in his early twenties Subodhānanda found himself securely situated as a rural Sinhalese monk with his own temple, a position in which many have lived quiet lives of comfort and satisfaction.

Subodhānanda must have had somewhat higher aspirations, however, for he began to read widely in the Vinaya.[4] Learning of this traditional kind is very highly respected among Sinhalese monks and in Sinhalese society in general; and it could not but have redounded to his benefit to join the illustrious company of *paṇḍita* (pundit) monks. However, unlike many in that company, Subodhānanda was not content to accept the pleasures of scholarship alone, but began to take the Vinaya to heart, realizing the vast difference between the monastic practice of his circle and that envisaged by the Vinaya. This engagement with the Vinaya might not in itself have produced a break with his background, but there was another circumstance which aggravated Subodhānanda's alienation. With the death of his first teacher, that primeval tie of loyalty and obedience which characterizes the relationship between an elder monk and a pupil taken in childhood or adolescence was broken; and not only had he been taken over as a pupil in manhood by another monk with whom he could not, in the nature of the situation, reconstitute that primeval tie, but he also came under the unwelcome surveillance of the elder pupils of that monk. One of those pupils, Indasumana, seems to have been particularly meddlesome.

It was with Indasumana that Subodhānanda quarrelled first. Subodhānanda's Ānāsiwatte temple, like most rural Sinhalese temples of that more spacious age, had a certain amount of land attached to it, land which was cultivated either to provide for the monks' table, or to bring in some money. The land was, moreover, planted in coconut trees, which go very well with the clean open stateliness of the Buddhist temple. In the process of

[4] The code of discipline.

keeping up the plantation, some coconut seedlings had been set out to mature, but Subodhānanda had neglected to build a fence to protect them, with the consequence that a neighbour's cow ate them. News of this bucolic misadventure reached Indasumana, who came to Subodhānanda to upbraid him. This, said Indasumana, is not the way to keep a temple properly. You must look after the land, you must look after the plants, and by no means must you let the neighbour's cows run rampant over the place. To this Subodhānanda replied sharply that he had not become a monk to look after a bunch of coconut plants, but rather to put an end to suffering; and he went on to quote chapter and verse from the Vinaya. Indasumana was not conspicuously pleased by this reply. It was the first of many quarrels with Porē Sobhita's associates and pupils.

Thereafter Subodhānanda began preaching on the Vinaya to the laymen of the area—not necessarily a great missionary effort, for he could merely have used the many ordinary occasions on which a village monk commonly preaches to his parishioners. The established Sangha of the Sinhalese villages is, as we have seen in Paññānanda's case, a professional class of land-owning clerics with a traditional—that is to say, largely unformulated but thoroughly precedented—system of values. The village monk is always vulnerable to criticism on the basis of Vinaya, for however good he may be in comparison with other villagers, he is still likely to be out of touch with most of the monastic rules. (In the village, for example, he may naturally handle money in the management of his temple; but according to the Vinaya, even touching money is an offence.) The great importance attached to unsullied moral discipline in the living Jātaka tradition ensures that such criticism finds an audience in the villagers; and for that very reason village monks are sensitive to such criticism.

We may therefore understand the sour reception Subodhānanda's colleagues gave his new sermon topic. Monks throughout the area began to complain about him. It is impossible to say exactly how explicit his sermons were, whether he referred to particular individuals or to particular practices, but in any case it is a well-understood art in a context of such formality to let the unsaid speak louder than what is said. While preaching in the temple of a monk from Välihiṅda, Subodhānanda waxed

eloquent on the Vinaya and its violation by contemporary monks. After he returned home, he received a message from the Välihiṅda monk to the effect that, if he were to continue preaching in that vein, Välihiṅda[5] would break his teeth. Subodhānanda told Välihiṅda's pupil, who had brought the message, that if Välihiṅda wished to break his teeth, he would be happy to go to Välihiṅda's temple to give him a chance. (I doubt that Subodhānanda's reply was in the spirit of Gandhian passive resistance; but in any case the encounter never took place.)

In the face of this deepening schism with his colleagues, Subodhānanda was forced to reflect on his own position. In the subsequent action he took, and his justification of that action, the fundamental ideology of the Buddhist Tāpasayō was formed. (Here his pupils, recounting his story, paint his internal struggle in bold strokes.) He asked himself whether he could remain in the Siyam Nikāya and still 'protect his discipline' (*sil rakinavā*) in the face of such moral turpitude. He concluded that he could not, as good monks should not associate with bad monks. (In the canon and the *Visuddhimagga*, this is a teaching founded firmly on psychological grounds: the monk cannot attend wholeheartedly to his salvation when surrounded by distracting influences. But in Subodhānanda's thinking it tends toward an absolute moral distinction between good and evil.) Where then could he turn?

At this point the *tāpasa pravrajyāva* recommended itself: the going forth as a *tāpasayā*. It was, after all, as a *tāpasayā* that the Lord Bodhisattva had perfected his virtue in birth after birth, and, far from taking his ordination from another, he had simply gone to the forest and got down to it by himself. Nor does Subodhānanda seem to have had the temperament for gracefully taking another teacher, though presumably he could have joined the relatively strict Rāmañña Nikāya.

So Subodhānanda duly wrote to Porē Sobhita, asking permission to leave the robes (he was not yet beyond the pale of these fundamental social obligations). Sobhita refused, and summoned Subodhānanda to a meeting. To the same meeting Sobhita brought Subodhānanda's mother, who wept, and

[5] Monks, especially in the older usage, were sometimes referred to simply by their place of origin.

pleaded with Subodhānanda not to take this step. Religious arguments were adduced: if Subodhānanda were to leave the robes, all the merit which had accrued to him and his mother by his becoming a monk would be wiped out. Hell's jaws would open for them. On the contrary, countered Subodhānanda: if his sainted mother were to die first and go to heaven, not all her merit could save him, were he to remain in the sin-drenched Siyam Nikāya. Furthermore, if he were to die first, while still in the Siyam Nikāya, he would end in hell-fire and his hapless mother would be dragged, willy-nilly, after him. (The doctrine of the effect of one's own deeds on the spiritual fate of one's relatives is evidently elastic.) At this telling reply, Porē Sobhita drove him out with a stream of abuse.

Having thus obtained his freedom, Subodhānanda went with one of his novice pupils to live in a patch of woods near Pore owned by the pupil's grandfather. There he took the *tāpasa* ordination, which consisted in announcing his intention to be an ascetic, and then putting on a robe, taking the basic ten precepts of a novice.[6] The first few years of this life must have been very difficult; but in 1902 he was invited by some residents of Koṭṭāva, not far away, to preach at the opening of a school there, and in time he moved to that community and settled down. In the absence of firmer detail concerning this process, it is important to bear in mind that he was accepted as a monk. Sinhalese village social categories do not admit of a distinction as fine as that between a Buddhist *tāpasayā* and an officially ordained member of an accepted *nikāya*.[7] Since Subodhānanda continued to shave his head and wear monastic robes, he remained, for them, a monk. He was most emphatically a monk in so far as he continued to preach, to chant *pirit*, and, most important, to accept alms from lay people—who, for their part, worshipped him with the elaborate obeisances due a monk in Ceylon.

With his re-establishment as a monk on his own terms,

[6] In the ten precepts the monk undertakes not to do any of the following: take life, steal, engage in sexual activity, lie, take intoxicants, eat after noon, attend musical or dramatic performances, use perfumes, sleep in a luxurious bed, or use money.

[7] Though, of course, nuances of personal attributes in a monk, such as age, experience, and learning, do produce corresponding nuances in lay behaviour toward him.

Subodhānanda was forced to refine his ideology because of opposition from his former colleagues, who now saw in him an altogether more dangerous opponent, for he had questioned their presuppositions successfully. They began to call him, among other things, *theyyasaṃvāsaka*, a Pali word meaning 'a monk by stealth'. He countered by calling them the same. As the consummation of this mutual abuse Subodhānanda wrote to some learned monks of the opposition, challenging them to a public debate. They accepted. On the way to the preaching hall where the debate was to be held, Subodhānanda and his supporters were met by a gang of thugs from the other side, but these were fended off. (We must remember now that this is a one-sided account, preserved by his pupils.) When they arrived at the hall, they found that fourteen pundits had been assembled to oppose him. The pundits' chairs were set on a dais, however, while Subodhānanda's had been set on the ground, to one side. Subodhānanda insisted that his chair be put on the stage with the others, and, after long remonstration, it was.

In so doing, his opposition had effectively ceded his status as a monk, for only monks may sit on a level with other monks. It was not, after all, a matter of canon law, but of the usages of village Ceylon. Subodhānanda thrashed them soundly on thirteen separate points of Vinaya. His supporters took him away jubilantly, laying white cloths on the ground for him to walk on; and he preached to a great throng in a nearby roadside shelter (*ambalama*) until dawn.

Now, whatever the accuracy of any particular detail in this account, clearly the *tāpasayō* were born in an atmosphere of uncompromising opposition to the ordinary village Sangha. This is as true of the later *tāpasayō* as it is of the small band Subodhānanda led. The ideology which Subodhānanda developed in the course of his struggle was therefore one which was concerned as much with attacking his opposition as with defining his own position. This is manifest in his handling of the *theyyasaṃvāsaka* charge.[8]

[8] Unfortunately I cannot give as detailed an account of this as I would like. I do not have a copy of the relevant document, which is *Theyyasaṃvāsaka Viniśchaya* ('An Adjudication of Ordination by Stealth'), published by Subodhānanda in 1908. I must therefore depend on my memory of a cursory reading of that document. Fortunately its doctrine changed little in the subsequent forty years, and I do have a lot of material from 1948 onward.

At the *locus classicus* of the term *theyyasaṃvāsaka* (Vin. MV. I. 62) the story is told of a certain delicately nurtured youth who, rather than struggle for a living, decided to become a monk and live off the bounty of the land; so he shaved his head, put on a robe, and went to a monastery. The Sangha, however, orders its daily social intercourse between monks according to relative age of ordination, so when this delicate youth was asked his age and the name of his teacher, he could not reply. The matter was brought before the Buddha, who announced that such a person, falsely presenting himself as a monk, should not be ordained, or, if ordained, should be expelled. Elsewhere a similar judgment is given in the case of monks who have gone over to other sects (*titthiyapakkantaka* MV. I. 62), and in the case of animals disguised as monks (especially the magic-wielding race of *nāga*s, cobras; *tiracchānagata* MV. I. 63) However, the real pejorative force of *theyyasaṃvāsaka* is found in its association with a list of undesirable types, which appears at various places (as, for example, at MV. II. 36, where the *Pāṭimokkha* is not to be recited before them). These include eunuchs, matricides, murderers of Buddhas, and seducers of nuns. It is largely at this level of pure invective that the debate was conducted.

There are slightly subtler points to be made, though. In the commentary to the story of the delicate youth[9] the commentator distinguishes chiefly between a thief of the signs, or appearance, of monkhood alone (*lingatthenika*), and a thief of the (right of) dwelling with monks (*saṃvāsatthenika*). The general principle enunciated is that a thief of the signs of monkhood may be someone who does so merely to escape some danger, such as the anger of a king, or a famine, or robbers. If such a person admits his subterfuge to the monks, he may be ordained. A thief of the right to dwell with monks, on the other hand, is someone who resolutely, and falsely, insists that he is a monk, that his age of ordination is such-and-such, and his teacher so-and-so. Such a person cannot be suffered in the Sangha, for his presence threatens its power to legitimize its own. Strictly speaking, of course, Subodhānanda was not a *saṃvāsatthenika*, for he did not claim to be a fellow of the monks he had just left. In wearing robes, and in acting in a clerical capacity toward laymen, however, he was usurping a status legitimized by the real principle

[9] *Samantapāsādika*, Vol. V, pp. 1016–19.

which determines who is a monk in the Sinhalese countryside: namely, that he was treated as such by laymen. This is not envisaged at all by the canon and commentaries. On the other hand, while it seems more relevant to call him a *lingatthenika*, in that he took the outward signs of a monk, he nevertheless presented himself as in another category altogether. (But later *tāpasayō* were sufficiently sensitive to the point to drape their robes in a way slightly different from that of the established Saṅgha.)

Subodhānanda, for his part, simply called all his opponents *saṃvāsatthenika*, on the grounds that, though they observed the outward etiquette of age among themselves, their morals were such that they were no monks at all. This crude but effective argument served as a bridge to his real point, which was that they should not be honoured and supported by the people. (There are many canonical sources he could quote in favour of this position.) Here is a sample of his rhetoric:

> ... To this sort of evil-living, sinful monks ... hospitality should not be given, they should not be honoured, they should receive no affection, they should not be offered the requisites of livelihood. The laymen should not seek them out, invite them, wash their feet, lay out seats with precious cloths for them, or otherwise honour these sinful, undeserving monks who do not accept that it is prohibited in the Buddhist religion to give them hospitality. ... [They are only] householders [in the guise of] monks, who deceive the people, sell the requisites [given them by the people] as well as cloth, handkerchiefs, potatoes and root crops, rice both husked and unhusked, limes, oranges, mangoes, rose apples, jack fruit, coconuts, rubber, and so forth, and enjoy the proceeds. ... Through the sin of worshipping these, who should not be worshipped, ... those defiled and degraded laymen, like a weight thrown down, will be born in hell.[10]

This text defines the main outline of Subodhānanda's position. He does not suggest a positive programme, for his movement exists chiefly as a criticism of the village monks of the area.

[10] B. A. Subodhānanda, *Śrī Saddharmādārśaya* (Mākumbure, 1953), pp. 37–8. The real flavour of vituperation and hypnotic repetition in Subodhānanda's writing—as, I reckon, in his preaching—cannot be fully appreciated without much more extensive quotation; which would, however, be altogether too taxing. This text itself is much later than the period of Subodhānanda's first bloom, but the message is the same.

By the same token, Subodhānanda was able, elsewhere, to attack the village monks for not living as forest-dwellers, though he was no forest-dweller himself. Most significant is the use he made of that strain of puritanical moralizing which we found in the Jātaka tradition—in, for example, Prince Temiya's resistance to the blandishments of the flesh. It formed the chief stock-in-trade of all subsequent *tāpasayō* and, in so far as it is a self-explanatory justification for asceticism in Sinhalese eyes, it also played some part in the formation of the other groups we will meet later.

For forty years Subodhānanda lay in obscurity even darker than that which the *tāpasayō* presently enjoy. By 1948 he had two able and vocal pupils—Dhīrānanda and Sumanasāra (as well as others)—three well-established temples, and substantial support among the people of his area. This very modest success ensured that, when the time came, Subodhānanda's *tāpasayō* were able to make their presence felt. In February 1948, Ceylon became independent, and at the same time Sinhalese Buddhists realized that the two thousand five hundredth anniversary—Buddha Jayanti—of Buddhism would be celebrated in 1956. In these suddenly altered circumstances the *tāpasayō*'s single-minded, unchanged message gained a value it had not otherwise been able to create for itself.

With their independence secured, and a spectacularly significant anniversary at hand—there were legends that the Buddha's teaching would die out in five thousand years, after experiencing a rejuvenation at the half-way mark—Sinhalese Buddhists turned to their very rich religio-political tradition for guidance. In the *Mahāvaṃsa*, the ancient chronicle, stood an unambiguous plan for the Sinhalese nation: an independent Ceylon and a flourishing Buddhism are inseparable, and, should one falter, the other must surely follow. Consequently anyone who offered an opinion about Buddhism or the conduct of Sangha affairs could feel that he was speaking of issues greater than the purely religious; while politicians gravitated closer and closer to religion, so that by the election of 1956 (but not afterwards) it was a central issue. Furthermore, since there was a great plurality of groups (though not of doctrine or practice) in the Buddhist fold, and since the government that Ceylon inherited from the British was secular and therefore not bound to

deal in religion at all, it was by no means clear whose voice should or would be heeded. In the excitement of the moment anyone could conceive his own convictions to be the most relevant, and could hope to prevail. The subsequent religious history of Ceylon might reasonably be viewed as the crystallization of the great plastic potential of the period 1948 to 1956.

Perhaps the first prominent voice raised for reform in public was that of Kaḍavädduvē Jinavaṃsa[11] who, starting in 1948, published articles in the newspapers, spoke on radio, and preached all over the country. With great eloquence and learning he called for a general reform of the Sangha, and founded a very serious and successful group of forest-dwelling monks. Vaturuvila Ñāṇānanda[12] had by 1948 founded a forest hermitage of some fame, and hoped, in accordance with ancient precedent, to be recognized as a national reformer. Asmaṇḍale Ratanapāla[13] began writing on reform. The Vinayavardhana (advancement of Vinaya) movement, which had been founded in 1938 by and for laymen to reform the Sangha, took on new life. Indeed, the same spirit penetrated to the world of Buddhist scholarship: Walpola Rahula's *The History of Buddhism in Ceylon*, written in the early 1950s, lays great stress on the ascetic ideal in classical Ceylon.

Subodhānanda's *tāpasayō* joined in this chorus with characteristic verve. In January 1948, they began publishing a magazine, called *Śāsana Parihāniya* ('Decline of Buddhism') which featured the following poem on the cover. It is directed at the *tāpasayō*'s old opponents, the temple monks:

> Having crept through the back door into the shelter of
> Buddhism
> Always leading the people astray, for the increase
> of their bellies, not for thinness,
> With one shoulder covered they take the guise of Vinaya
> So this magazine appears, called 'Decline of Buddhism'.[14]

(I take it that 'having one shoulder covered' refers to the tradi-

[11] See Chapter 10.

[12] See Chapter 9.

[13] See Chapter 8.

[14] In 1949 the magazine's name was changed to *Śāsana Ārakṣāva: Protection of the Buddhist Religion*, probably on the grounds that the old name was not good advertising.

tional method by which Siyam Nikāya monks drape their robes.) The lead article, entitled 'Our Purpose' ('*Apagē paramārtthaya*') presents a vigorous programme. After likening present-day Buddhism to a cloth soiled by 'soot, dirt, excrement, urine, phlegm and spittle', it suggests that *Decline of Buddhism* be used to show what needs to be purified. It then goes on to say:

We [hereby] state that all good Buddhists should take [this magazine called] *Decline of Buddhism*, like an atom bomb, and go from village to village, from city to city, pointing out [abuses], and destroy the enemies of Buddhism, who are opposed to the Buddha and poisonous to Buddhism.[15]

On the cover of the magazine the *tāpasayō* provide twelve handy cartoon pictures in which laymen can recognize typical abuses by the Sangha. For example, we find 'learning outside subjects' deplored (*Bāhira śāstra igenīma*—learning subjects other than Pali and Dhamma, that is)—this is illustrated with a picture of a monk leaning back over his seat in a classroom to talk (flirt) with the girl at the desk behind him; on the blackboard are written, in English, the word 'communism' and the equation $(a + b)^2 = a^2 + 2ab + b^2$. Other abuses include living in cities, being involved in politics, practising medicine or casting spells, selling to (Muslim) traders the requisites given by the faithful, and taking donations under false pretexts.

Meanwhile Subodhānanda's *tāpasayō* clung to their mythological charter as ascetics. In the June 1948 issue of *Decline* the lead article—attributed to the editor, but probably written by Dhīrānanda, who poured a tremendous amount of energy into the new enterprise—speaks directly to the issue of 'Taking the Tāpasa Ordination in a Buddhist Age' (*Buddhotpādayehi Tāpasa Pravrjyā Gānīma*). This answers the objection raised by the opposition that, when a Buddha's teaching and the Sangha still exist, there is no need for the *tāpasa* ordination, since one can join the Sangha itself. The editor replies by adducing examples from the Jātakas, such as the incarnation of the Bodhisattva as the *tāpasayā* Sumedha (J. I. 2), who was blessed by the Buddha of that time, Dipaṃkara, and told that he too would eventually be a Buddha; Sumedha remained a *tāpasayā*, however, and did not join the Sangha. The editor also refers to passages in the

[15] *Śāsana Parihāniya*, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 4.

canon and commentaries in which the moral life is likened to *tapas*, burning up moral impurities. (Neither does the editor neglect to point out the moral turpitude of the enemy.) More important than this and similar articles, however, was a pamphlet (which I have not been able to find) describing Subodhānanda's method of self-ordination and the idea of the *tāpasa pravrajyāva* in general; this pamphlet received wide circulation and was seminal to the broader *tāpasa* movement which we will shortly meet.

As the Buddha Jayanti approached, the activity and sphere of influence of Subodhānanda's pupils grew. By 1953 their magazine began to record journeys up and down the country to preach and debate. Though much of this was accomplished by the tireless Dhīrānanda and Sumanasāra, they gradually collected a group of about six other articulate monks who carried the burden of writing and preaching. Beyond this core there may have been as many as a hundred others with them at the height of the excitement in 1954, but most of these melted away. To this period, however, Subodhānanda's pupils owe several permanent temples in the Kurunegala district. Though in fact they themselves were never a very large group, nor attracted a very large following of permanent supporters, their message of reform was so shrill, and communicated with such energy, that they had an influence beyond their numbers. We must finally judge that their principal contribution to the spirit of the Buddha Jayanti lay in their enthusiasm, and their advocacy of the notion of the *tāpasa* ordination.

In any case their contribution did not lie in their practice of a rigorously ascetic way of life (beyond a firm adherence to the ten precepts, that is) nor did they offer much in the way of a positive programme for the ascetic life. They did not teach meditation, nor, from their publications, does it seem to have been much of a concern to them. They remained village monks, clerics ministering to a constituency. We must therefore leave Subodhānanda's *tāpasayō*—with some regret, for they were a colourful group—and turn to Vābaḍa Tāpasa Himi, the Venerable *tāpaṣayā* from Vābaḍa.

CHAPTER 7

The Legends in Practice: II. Asceticism in the Streets

Vābaḍa Tāpasa Himi—the Venerable *tāpasayā* from Vābaḍa—rose to national fame for a brief while in 1954, on the crest of that wave of religious enthusiasm to which Subodhānanda's group contributed so much. Tāpasa Himi and his followers were the most spectacular and the most evanescent religious manifestation of that time. The newspapers and public often confused them with other groups of *tāpasayō*, and even with the ascetic monks of the recognized *nikāyas*, but to us they stand out clearly enough: they were predominantly young (most being in their late teens), they had no organization but the loose allegiance to Tāpasa Himi, and they were uneducated in the traditions and skills of the Sinhalese Sangha. Indeed they had little character of their own beyond what they collected from the mood of the times, through the opinions of their lay sympathizers, the writings of Subodhānanda's group, and, later, the pamphlets of the Vinayavardhana movement.[1] They were, in short, as nearly perfect a manifestation of folk ideas about the life of renunciation as we can hope to find.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the best sources for Tāpasa Himi's career are rumour and the newspapers. In this distorting and magnifying medium he lived in 1954, and in many ways, though now sunk into obscurity, he still lives a public life. He still issues broadsides, for example, calling upon the Government of Sri Lanka to rectify this or that moral fault: the sale of liquor or the killing of rabid dogs, among others. And indeed he is still peripatetic. I was unable to track him down. A long-suffering colleague, L. A. P. Banḍāra, did manage to do so, however, and for Tāpasa Himi's personal viewpoint I depend on his excellent findings. I also depend on the excellent memory of the Venerable Tāmbugala Ānandasiri, who participated in

[1] See Steven Kemper, 'Buddhism without Bhikkhus: The Sri Lanka Vinaya Vardena Society', in *Religion and the Legitimization of Power in Sri Lanka*, ed. B. Smith, Anima Books (Chambersburg, P.A., 1978).

so many facets of the modern forest-dwelling movement.

Vābaḍa Tāpasa Himi was born Hemachandra Kularatna on 29 January 1934. He told Banḍāra that this was exactly nine months after the death of Anagārika Dharmapāla, Ceylon's great modernist Buddhist hero.[2] Tāpasa Himi also said that Dharmapāla's last words were these: 'If [someone] comes preaching with a robe over his shoulder in twenty years, know that it is Anagārika Dharmapāla.' And of course it was in about 1954 that Tāpasa Himi began preaching.

Tāpasa Himi is said by his followers to have been particularly gentle as a child, refusing to harm even the smallest ant. His parents were sufficiently well-to-do to be concerned that their son take over the family estate. (Both these details, of course, lend themselves well to hagiography.) His father was a local schoolteacher of the highest, Goyigama, caste. The only other child, a daughter, became a schoolteacher and married.

The most important influence on Tāpasa Himi, as he recounted it to his followers in 1954 and to Banḍāra in 1974, was an elder friend or relation to whom he referred as 'grandfather' (*attā*). This gentleman lived for forty-three years as a lay ascetic (*dasa sil upāsakayā*), 'protecting his morality' (*sil rakinavā*), that is, adhering to the ten precepts, which are also taken by novice monks. This too harks back to Anagārika Dharmapāla, who invented the role at about the time that Subodhānanda had become a *tāpasayā*; the difference lies in whether one claims the respect due a monk, which Tāpasa Himi's grandfather apparently did not. 'I got very used to that grandfather's practices,' said Tāpasa Himi. 'He preached to me. He taught me. So my mind was attracted to the endless good qualities of the Buddha.'

And what did his grandfather teach him? A number of practices, unknown to the *Visuddhimagga* or the prescriptive parts of the canon, but based entirely on an interpretation of the Jātaka tradition. Tāpasa Himi believed, for example, that a true ascetic must mash his food into seven bite-sized balls at a time before eating it. This commemorates a passage in the legendary biography of the Buddha[3] which describes how, just

[2] He was off by three months, for there was nearly a year separating the two dates.

[3] From the *Nidānakathā* to the *Jātaka Aṭṭhakathā*.

before his enlightenment, the Buddha was given a bowl of milk rice by the woman Sujātā. He mashed the milk rice into forty-nine balls, seven for each of the seven days he would sit in contemplation after his enlightenment. Though conventional monastic training contains a good deal about how to eat and how to think about eating, it has nothing as ritualistic as this. Another legacy of the grandfather was a verse in Pali whose import was that whoever opposes the *śāsana*—the Buddhist religion, taken to mean the ascetic ideal—goes directly to the four great hells and shuttles back and forth between them for a million eons. This, said Tāpasa Himi, was constantly with him throughout his career.

He finished the eighth standard in Sinhalese in the middle school in his village, began further study, but then quit because he was turning more and more to the religious life. He began to frequent a newly founded hermitage, Māligātänna, near his home, and there he met the young monk Ānandasiri. Ānandasiri was very well educated in Pali and the traditions of the Sangha,[4] and was seeking to rediscover and live the forest life through that knowledge. For about three months—it must have been in 1950, when Tāpasa Himi was sixteen—the young layman, still dressed in schoolboy's shorts, frequented the monastery. Ānandasiri was perfectly frank with him: he said that he was questioning the validity of his own ordination, and that he had deep doubts about the legitimacy of the village Sangha as the inheritors of the Buddha's legacy.

Ānandasiri preserves two memories of those days which give us a tantalizing, if inconclusive, glimpse of the young man's character and family life. Tāpasa Himi wished to become a monk, but was told by Ānandasiri that he could not become a novice without his parents' permission. Ānandasiri suggested that they all visit him to discuss the matter, and they did so. This is the encounter, from my field notes:

While the three of them were standing there [before Ānandasiri] the boy would not look at them, but was always standing apart, looking away, avoiding their gaze. The father characterized the son as *pissu*—crazy. Ānandasiri told the father that he shouldn't say that, since, if he were not *pissu*—and Ānandasiri added that he was not—then he might

[4] His story is told in the last chapter. He associated at this time with Ñāṇānanda, of Chapter 9.

be forced into it. Ānandasiri then insisted that the son should come and worship [traditional Sinhalese sign of respect shown by bowing to the ground before an elder, a superior, or a monk] the father, and that they should be reconciled. After considerable persuasion, they were reconciled; but not, admitted Ānandasiri, for long.

Ānandasiri also said that the youngster seemed to be of a 'speculative nature'—*vitakka*—though there were others, besides his father, who treated this as madness. He would walk along the road, slow down, stop, and look vacantly into the trees. It was a charge Tāpasa Himi had to face both before and after he rose to fame.

At the end of three months Ānandasiri and the young seeker went their separate ways. Tāpasa Himi went to another newly founded hermitage, Madunāgala,[5] where he studied to become a monk. He failed, however, to learn the *Dhammapada*, a collection of homiletic verses from the canon, by heart. This was attributed to various causes by the monks, some of whom became very bitter toward him after his meteoric rise as the Vābaḍa Ascetic, but the most charitable explanation was that he was too distracted, too dreamy, to apply himself. He found his way back to Vābaḍa, where he met Ānandasiri again.

In the meantime Ānandasiri had gone seeking as well. He had visited some *tāpasayō* near Ratnapura who had ordained themselves after reading a pamphlet written by Subodhānanda; presumably this was the pamphlet mentioned in the last chapter on the 'going forth as a *tāpasayā*'. Ānandasiri brought a copy of the pamphlet back and lent it to Tāpasa Himi, with the comment that he, Ānandasiri, did not necessarily accept it, but it had some valuable ideas. This was in late 1951.

Little did Ānandasiri realize the consequences this innocent piece of advice to a fellow seeker would have. He next heard, in January 1952, that his erstwhile advisee had shaved his head, put on some sort of robe, and was living in a cemetery near Vābaḍa. Tāpasa Himi was eighteen, and his career had begun in earnest.

Until the end of 1953 it is impossible to establish a chronology of events, but it was in this period that Tāpasa Himi's style was

[5] See Chapter 9.

formed, so we shall have to content ourselves with an account of the main features of his movement. We shall then turn to the events of his public notoriety and eclipse.

His first choice of residence set the tone for the rest of his career. A cemetery, a clear place usually by a road, is known and feared by everyone and frequented only by the brave or foolhardy, for in village eyes it is inhabited by demons, ghosts, or both. It offers the advantage of being certainly deserted and therefore available; and for the ascetic it also has an emblematic character, for it suggests one of the *dhutangas*, meditation on a corpse in a cemetery. (Tāpasa Himi had heard of the *dhutangas* from Ānandasiri.) But the chief effect of residence in a cemetery is that it is an open and public display of asceticism, bound to draw attention at a time when religious matters were so much in the Sinhalese consciousness. Tāpasa Himi and his emulators were to spend a good deal of time in cemeteries.

And almost immediately the seeds of mythic stories took root. He did not have a begging bowl when he went to the cemetery, but, by his account, a woman made a bowl out of her water pot and gave it to him. A more enthusiastic version of the story is told by one Sobhita, a close companion of Tāpasa Himi who described himself in print as a pupil of 'the Resplendent Praiseworthy Anagārika Dharmapāla Leading Venerable Lord of Vābaḍa'. This is his account from my field notes:

> Our Tāpasa Leader just went out and lived in a cemetery. He lived in a cemetery. That was near Vābaḍa. He didn't ask for anything, he didn't bother anyone, he just sat there, meditating. While he was meditating an old woman, very poor, very old, came on her way to the well with a pot. She saw our Tāpasa Leader sitting there in the cemetery. She went to our Tāpasa Leader, worshipped him, and then what did she do? What did she do? She saw that he didn't have a bowl, so she broke her pot and gave it to him! She broke her pot and gave it to him!

This calls up the association of the Buddha, sitting under the Bodhi Tree just before his enlightenment, and the encounter with the woman Sujātā, who gave him the bowl of milk rice while he sat there. Note, too, the age and poverty of the woman, which render her sacrifice the more pious. This story was told and retold constantly.

To the cemetery and the modest begging bowl were added an

armoury of other special signs. For example, a monk is reminded on the occasion of his higher ordination that he is to depend on a tree for shelter, rag robes for clothing, begged food for sustenance, and fermented cow urine and gall-nut for medicine. While the young Tāpasa Himi was visiting Ānandasiri at the hermitage, before his renunciation, a local physician used to brew the gall-nut and urine medicine, and he advised that the monks take two tablespoons a day. The monks balked at this, but Tāpasa Himi was soon able to down the dose without a grimace. The upshot was that Tāpasa Himi and his followers were found drinking glasses of cow urine up and down the countryside. Ānandasiri did not escape the consequences: one day, after he had walked many hot, thirsty miles, laymen who mistook him for one of the *tāpasayō* invited him to stop and have a refreshing drink, which turned out to be a brimming beaker of cow urine.

Another strikingly visible attribute of Tāpasa Himi and his followers was their walk: head down, small steps, slow and deliberate. This is meant to be the outward demeanour of a monk mindful of his internal affairs, little involved with the world, as we saw in Chapter 3. For Tāpasa Himi this meditative preoccupation was something rather unorthodox: he said that he walked 'measuring his steps' (*piyavara mänīma*). His pupil Sobhita was even more unorthodox, for he 'went everywhere *counting* [his] steps' (*hämatänama piyavara ganaṃ kalā giya*). But whether the inner practice was calm mindfulness, as it is meant to be, or counting of steps, the appearance corresponded to the public's stereotype of an ascetic monk.

Indeed this feature of the movement was one of the most energetically discussed. The walk and the general demeanour of the *tāpasayō* had such an effect that the press, whether favourable to the movement or opposed, continually remarked that one cannot judge a monk by outward behaviour. There was in fact a rumour, spread especially by the anti-*tāpasayā* press,[6] to the effect that it was a hoax. The same story was recounted to me in 1973 by a layman. From my field notes:

The *tāpasa* movement is a Christian plot, laid on by the Bishop of X, to undermine Buddhism at this crucial point in its history. Poor, low-

[6] See *Siṃhala Bauddhayā*, 28 June 1954.

caste men from south India were hired to go about the countryside in robes with begging bowls, led by a few trained Christians who preached against Buddhism. In order to simulate a restrained walk, their legs were cleverly tied together beneath their robes with a short rope, so they were forced to walk slowly.

This rumour is sheer pernicious nonsense, but it is easy to see what it is made of. The anti-Christian tone was taken from the rising Buddhist nationalism of the time, as was the anti-Tamil part of the story; while the detail of the legs being tied together plays on the difficulty which is popularly attributed to the composed walk. The persistence of the rumour displays the persistence of this image of ascetic behaviour in the popular Buddhist imagination.

Part and parcel of this image, of course, is that of the indefatigable meditator, rooted to the spot, conquering himself despite all the temptations and pains of the flesh. In this respect, too, the *tāpasayō* garnered the attention and respect of the villagers. Another of my associates, Mrs Kumāri Disānāyaka, wrote a short outline of the *tāpasa* movement at my request,[7] and provided this example of *tāpasa* meditation:

A *tāpasa* monk lived and meditated in the cemetery of a certain village in the Kurunegala area. Suddenly there was a very heavy rain storm, and the *tāpasa* monk, wet for days on end, became very ill. When people came to check on him, they found him sitting in the same position, ignoring the rain, and they took him to the hospital. He was in critical condition. It seems that beneath his robe, which was rotting, leeches and other insects were drinking his blood. This tragic story, preserved among the people, bears witness in brief to the firm determination and genuine meditation of some of the *tāpasa* monks.

I may add that 'genuine meditation' can only refer to their determination, for I did not record a single meditative practice among the *tāpasayō* which corresponded to those canonically prescribed, either in the letter or the spirit.

All these features seem to have been peculiar to those inspired by Tāpasa Himi. But there was one facet of his *tāpasayō* which he shared with Subodhānanda's group: their preaching style.

[7] She copied every article on the movement from the Sinhalese newspapers for my records—for which she earned my undying gratitude—and she also talked to a number of her elders who had been cognizant of, or involved in, the movement. The quotation is translated from her Sinhalese.

The sermons were very much directed at the abuses of the religious establishment, and were, as Ānandasiri characterized them, very 'biting and violent' (*särayi raudrayi*). Sobhita, who himself cultivates a biting style of address, praised the miraculous ferocity of Tāpasa Himi's sermonizing, and deplored its decay when the movement faded away. On the one hand, Tāpasa Himi seems to have been constrained to attacking conventional village monks for the simple reason that he did not know enough, by Ānandasiri's testimony, to deliver even the simplest conventional sermon. More important, however, were the genuinely felt grievances to which such preaching was a response. I recorded many such examples, but let this one suffice: a *tāpasayā* of my acquaintance was given a ready hearing and, eventually, a permanent home by villagers near Maho when, following the death of the village incumbent and the absence of a successor, the chief monk of the area stepped in and leased the temple to a layman for vegetable cultivation. Tāpasa Himi had only to give voice to the feelings that were in the air.

The message then, was reform, made credible by manifest public asceticism; but who heard the message? I have discussed this at some length in another publication,[8] so I will merely summarize my findings—or perhaps better, my speculations, for there is little information available.

At one time or another people from every social group in Buddhist Ceylon supported the *tāpasayō*. Their message and behaviour were universally recognizable. They seem to have been more warmly supported in the country than in the city, though, and the most abiding support seems to have come from the poor rather than the rich. They were also supported by low-caste people. In general caste played a part in the *tāpasa* movement similar to that which it played in the later Insurgency of 1971: it heightened emotional tension in some areas without providing the basic cause or justification of the movement.[9] It also seems likely that in some areas people supported *tāpasayō*

[8] 'The Modern Ascetics of Lanka and the Pattern of Change in Buddhism', *Man*, Vol. 14, pp. 304–7.

[9] See Gananath Obeyesekere, 'Some Comments on the Social Backgrounds of the April 1971 Insurgency in Sri Lanka (Ceylon)', *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 3, pp. 367–84.

against village monks as an expression of political factional divisions within the village.

Who joined the *tāpasayō*? It is even more difficult to be confident of an answer to this question, but one thing is clear: they were mostly young. Some were from conventionally respectable backgrounds, like Tāpasa Himi himself, but others were from the lower fringes of Sinhalese Buddhist society. Tāpasa Himi's first disciple, in fact, was a Tamil boy, a poor estate worker's son from a rubber estate. Tāpasa Himi said this: 'Many thugs, thieves, and gangsters came to me and conducted their monk's life very obediently. People who had been married three months, or one day, people who had seven or eight children, realizing the instability of lay life and the superiority of my movement, became monks with me. One day twenty-six people took ordination with me.' I would venture to say, therefore, that those who followed Tāpasa Himi were drawn, like the candidates for some more conventional forest movements, from all estates of society; but the young and the underprivileged made up the greater proportion of his followers.

Between the beginning of 1952 and the end of 1953, when *tāpasayō* began to figure prominently in the Sinhalese press, Tāpasa Himi's reputation grew. At the height of the movement, sometime in 1954, there were perhaps several hundred *tāpasayō* who owed their inspiration to him, though very many may never have seen him: for, after all, one could ordain oneself.

This dispersal is one of the chief features of the movement's social organization—or, better, disorganization. There was no really formal way of telling whether someone was a member or not, though Tāpasa Himi did sometimes preside loosely over disciples taking the ten precepts. It was very like schoolboy society: one belonged with him as one belongs to a clique in school. Tāpasa Himi said that those who left him 'changed and went' (*venas velā giya*), an indictment which reveals the wholly tacit standards of personal opinion which ruled him and his milieu. Sobhita even used the same expression of Tāpasa Himi himself.

This lack of internal structure corresponded to an absence of policy with respect to the laity. Far from stamping their character on events, events moulded them. Ānandasiri records that once, after the movement was under way, he arranged for a

number of prosperous members of the community near Vābaḍa to meet Tāpasa Himi to discuss setting up permanent hermitages. When they arrived for the discussion, however, they discovered that yet another group of laymen had arrived before them, had urgently pressed Tāpasa Himi to come to their village to preach, and that he had accepted.

Although *Siṃhala Bauddhayā* ('Sinhalese Buddhist'), a virulently anti-*tāpasa* paper, had already printed several articles deploring the *tāpasayō* in general in 1953, Tāpasa Himi does not seem to have been recognized as a distinct leader until the beginning of 1954, when he enters the newspapers with a vengeance. On 11 January 1954, the dailies *Laṃkādīpa* and *Dinamiṇa* carried reports of his entry into Kandy. Accompanied by seventeen other *tāpasayō* he went to stay in a cadjan hut on top of a hill, Välikanda in Mahayiyāva, within the municipal limits. Hundreds and thousands of people came to worship them, bringing so many goods and food to offer them that finally these were handed out to beggars in the city. Police had to re-route traffic. So deeply felt was the enthusiasm that even Muslims and Hindu Tamils came. Two days later Tāpasa Himi's following of *tāpasayō* had swollen to thirty-two,[10] probably by those who joined on the spot. Behind these events lies the great sense of urgency with which the Buddhist faithful are perennially willing to offer alms to monks deemed holy. (I witnessed a similar, but much smaller and more decorous rush to present alms in 1973, when a monk rumoured to have attained a blessed state—*sotāpatti*—visited Colombo.) What rumours spread among the people to produce such a response I do not know, but some, at least, thought Tāpasa Himi to be a saint (*arhat*).

Even at this moment of high enthusiasm, however, the swift and painful end of the movement was prefigured. On 15 January, a report from Gampola, near Kandy, was published in *Laṃkādīpa*. This is the entire article:

'Throughout the last eight days huge numbers of people have come in a steady stream to see two "tāpasa bhikkhus" meditating in the Käbiligala cemetery.

'But one day, when an even greater crowd came to see them,

[10] *Laṃkādīpa*, 13 January 1954.

only the robes of the two "tāpasa bhikkhus" were found, hanging on a gravestone.'

It is not difficult to see, through the ironic brevity of this report, the disappointment of the crowd or the dilemma of the failed *tāpasayō*, who, for their part, had already done something quite remarkable in managing to sit there for eight days. In so far as the crowds expected something which even well-trained and experienced meditators would be hard put to deliver, they were bound for disappointment. Momentary enthusiasm is no substitute for training. In the next months and years this event was to be repeated all over Ceylon.

Altogether more serious, however, was the deep and often bitter division between the *tāpasayō* and their supporters on the one hand, and the established monks and their own supporters on the other. This division was already present, fully developed and rich in incident, in January 1954, when Tāpasa Himi was in Kandy. The only personal testimony I have for those few days is that of a Kandyan Siyam Nikāya monk, who told me that the *tāpasayō* (characterized as a bunch of criminals, Christians, and Communists), had tried to steal the Tooth Relic, but the police had prevented them from doing so. (This is Buddhist Ceylon's most precious national treasure, the symbolic importance of which can be gauged by the fact that kings, and lately prime ministers, of Ceylon have always gone to worship the Tooth immediately upon investiture.) Though this version of events has had twenty years to ossify into its present extreme form, it nevertheless represents the alarm and indignation of the Kandyan religious establishment at the time.

On the other side, among Tāpasa Himi's *tāpasayō* and, in particular, among his lay devotees, rumours flew about to the effect that the Kandyan monks in charge of the Temple of the Tooth would prevent the *tāpasayō* from worshipping there.

So far as I can ascertain from newspaper reports,[11] what actually happened was relatively minor. On one of the evenings after Tāpasa Himi had recently arrived in Kandy, a group of *tāpasayō* and lay supporters had gone to the Temple of the Tooth to worship. When the monk in charge came to close the doors at 10 o'clock, he found that the *tāpasayō* and their supporters were not inclined to leave. Words were exchanged and the

[11] *Laṃkādīpa*, 16 January 1954; *Siḷumiṇa*, 10 January 1954.

Kandyan monk was shocked to find that he was not respected in the traditional fashion. He, or his fellows, were also shocked to discover that these 'people dressed in robes' (*sivura poravā gata minissu*) were not monks by their definition; with the implication that, had they known of it, they might not have let the *tāpasayō* into the Temple. The incident ended peacably enough.

Tempers were inflamed, however. On the side of the *tāpasayō*, there was talk that the Temple should not be such a centre of corruption—a very great amount of money is collected in the 'merit boxes' (*pin peṭṭi*) there—and even that it should be forcibly opened to the truly faithful, the followers of Tāpasa Himi. On the other side, the lay trustees (Kandyan aristocrats) of the Temple called in the police, who stationed two guards and a stand-by crew to prevent further trouble. They also announced that the Inspector-General of Police, Sir Richard Aluvihare (a Kandyan aristocrat), was coming to Kandy to consult various people about protecting the Tooth.

Subsequently the police made arrangements for Tāpasa Himi to worship at the Temple, though I do not know whether he did so. Shortly thereafter he must have left Kandy. He had earned the undying enmity of the Kandyan establishment by the incident, however, and this was to play a significant part in the demise of his movement. Certainly the Kandyan monks of the Malwatta and Asgiri chapters, heirs to the feudal religious establishment in Kandy, used their connections with members of the Kandyan aristocracy in government to oppose the *tāpasayō* wherever they could.

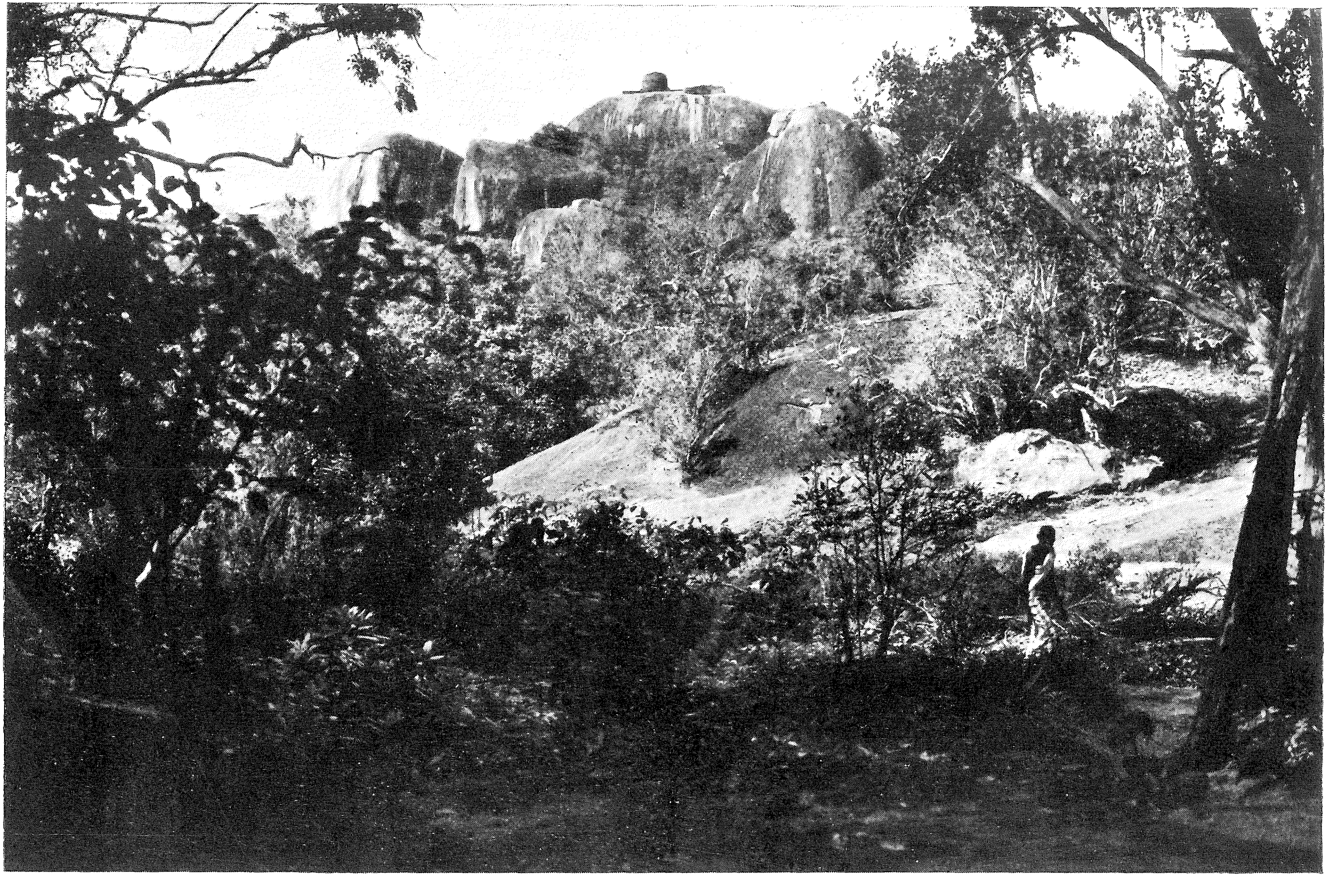
A similar conflict between supporters of the *tāpasayō* and their opponents was repeated at Adam's Peak, site of the Buddha's footprint. This pilgrimage centre is in the hands of the richest temple in Ceylon. The 25 February 1954 issue of *Laṃkādīpa* reports that some *tāpasayō* threw the merit box off the top of the peak, saying, 'the Buddha has no use for this kind of thing'. A *tāpasayā* spoke in an 'unbefitting manner' (*nosähena lesa*) to the monk in charge. There were also altercations (*vāda vivāda*) among laymen present. Apparently on the same occasion (23 February, *Dinamiṇa*) this monk made the following announcement over his loudspeaker to the crowd: 'Don't believe in these people who have taken the robe without a teacher. There are thugs among these *tāpasayō* who have been in prison, who have

committed robberies, who are drunkards. They might even steal your own belongings. This courtyard of the holy footprint is no place for their doings. Why don't the police act to expel them?' In fact the police were notified, and the newspaper articles imply that they were ready to act. Beginning with the events in Kandy, the newspapers report constantly that *tāpasayō* were arrested, fingerprinted, questioned, and even brought to trial. While this reveals a consistent policy on the part of the police, it is also likely that some people took advantage of the *tāpasa* movement for their own ends.

Similar confrontations occurred elsewhere. In June 1954, two *tāpasayō* and a laywoman, with the co-operation of a committee (*sabhāva*) of lay donors, undertook a fast to prevent a hermitage on the coast south of Colombo (Dharmadīpa Yogāśrāma, at Kaluvāmōdara) being turned over to a party of ordinary monks. S. W. R. D. Bandaranayaka and Dudley Senanayaka, two very prominent figures in government, sent telegrams, requesting the fasters to desist. Two days later the fast came to an end.[12] On 14 June[13] a meeting was convened in Tangalle, on the south coast, to decide 'how Buddhism should be protected [supported]'. When someone proposed that this could best be done by working with the *tāpasayō*, the meeting broke up and police had to be called in to prevent violence.

The extent to which the established temple monks were threatened by this current of opposition was attested to by Ānandasiri. During the same journey through the south on which he was offered cow urine to drink, laymen invited him and his companions to stay in the local temple. When they went there, the leading layman spoke roughly to the incumbent of the temple, and wrested the keys to the building from his hands. Nothing could be further from the customary decorum and respect with which monks are treated in Ceylon. By the same token, more than one temple monk told me that, while the *tāpasayō* were flourishing, ordinary monks were not offered food by the laymen of their area. While this would not have affected the landed Kandyan monks, many others who depended directly on the contributions of their supporters must have felt a more dire alarm (a hollow feeling in the pit of the stomach)

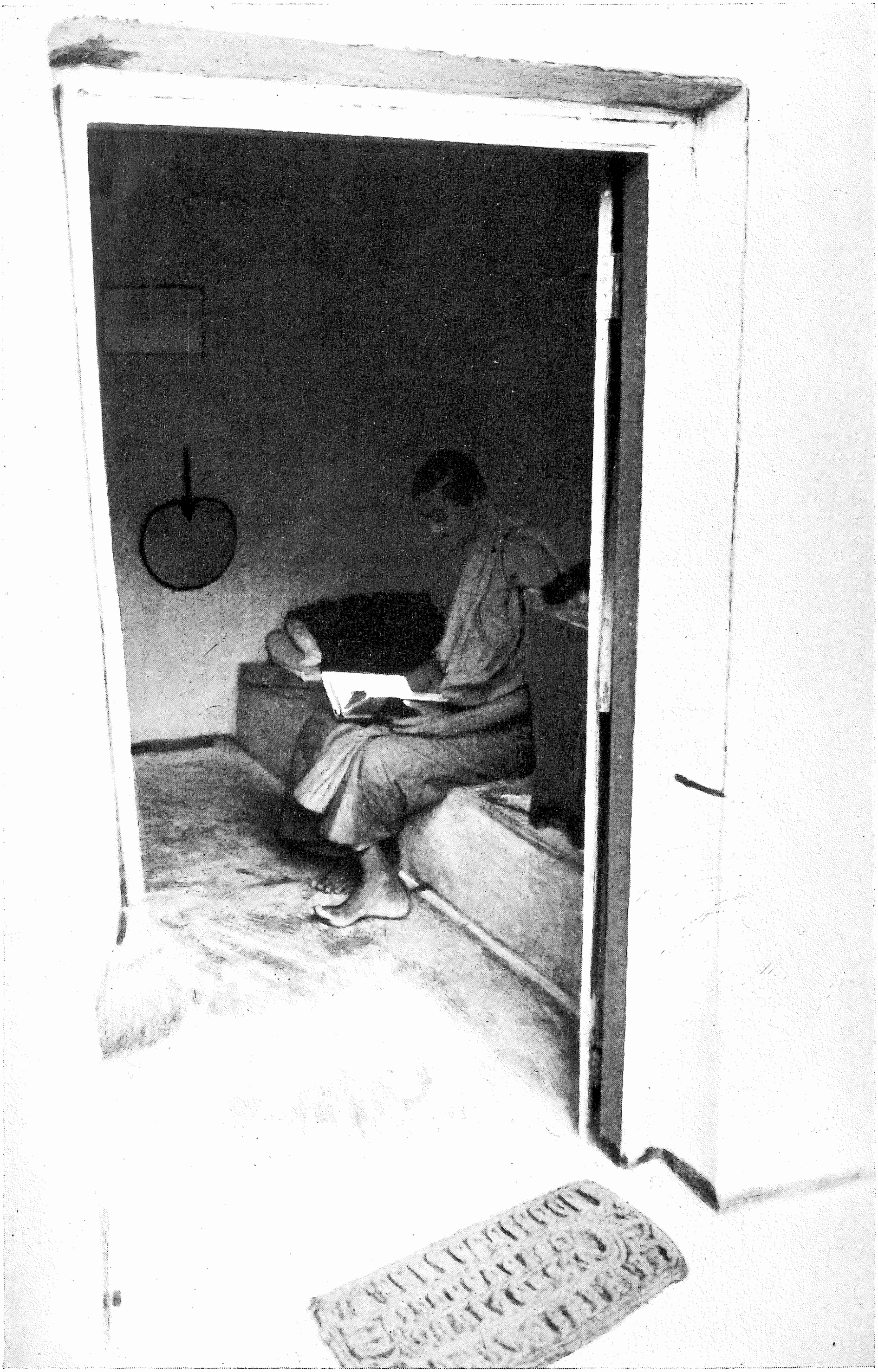
[12] *Dinamiṇa*, 2 and 4 June.
[13] *Dinamiṇa*.



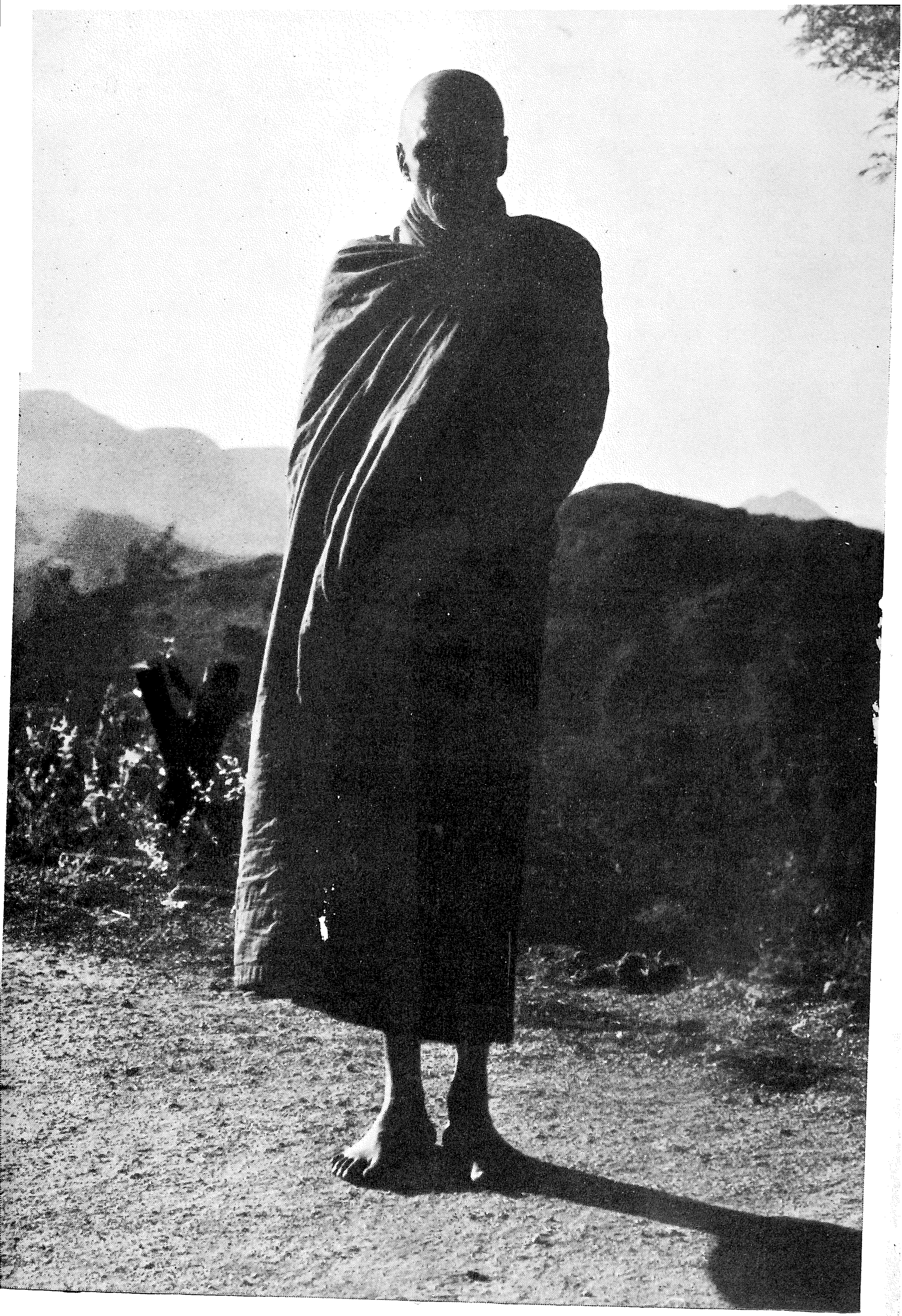
The deep forest at Kuḍumbigala. An ancient stupa, reconstructed, on the rock above, a lay devotee on an errand below.



Two monks' cells. Kuḍumbigala.



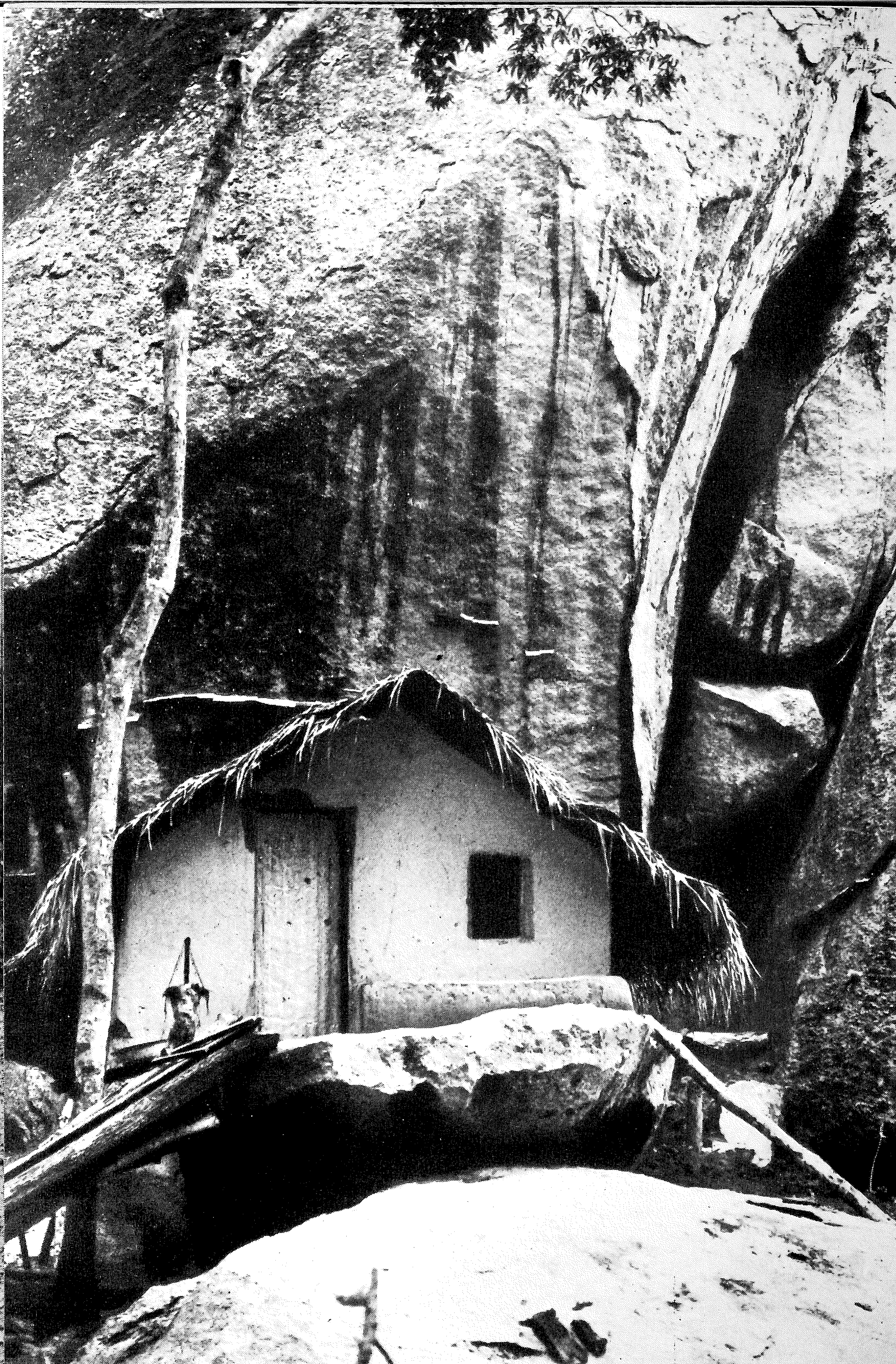
A monk in his cell. The bed is concrete.



A monk in typically composed posture.



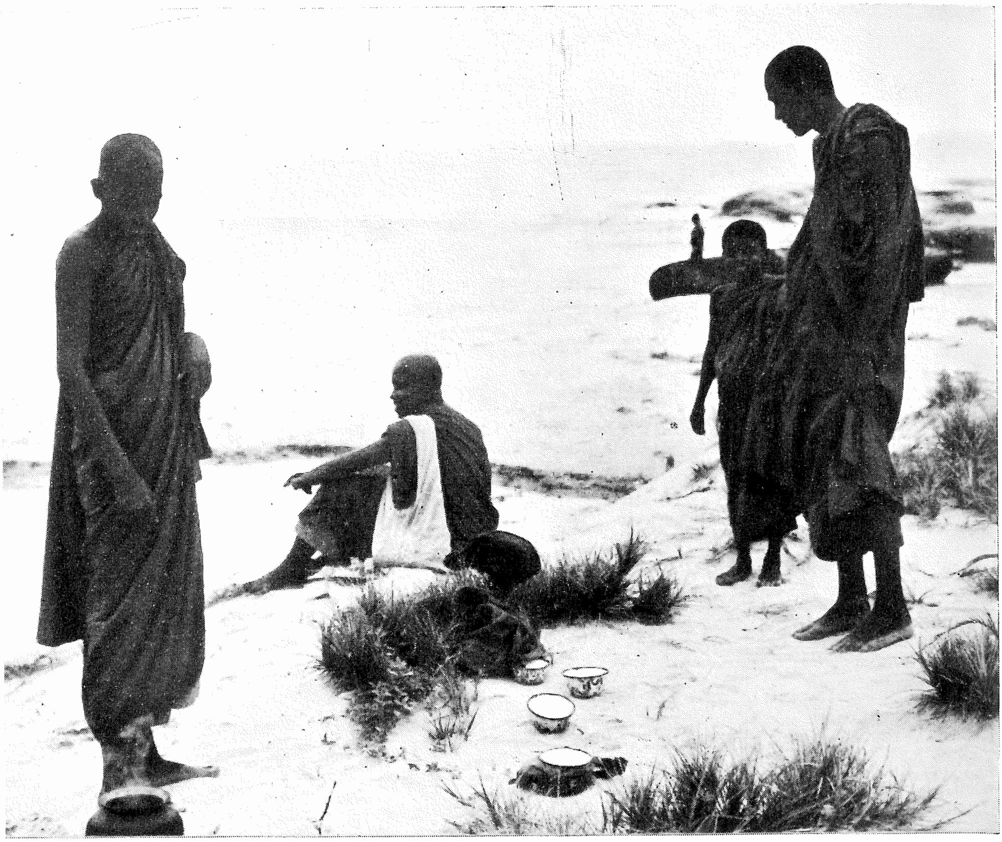
Monks preparing to worship the stupa atop the rock at Kuḍumbigala.
The monk in the centre will kneel on his folded mat.



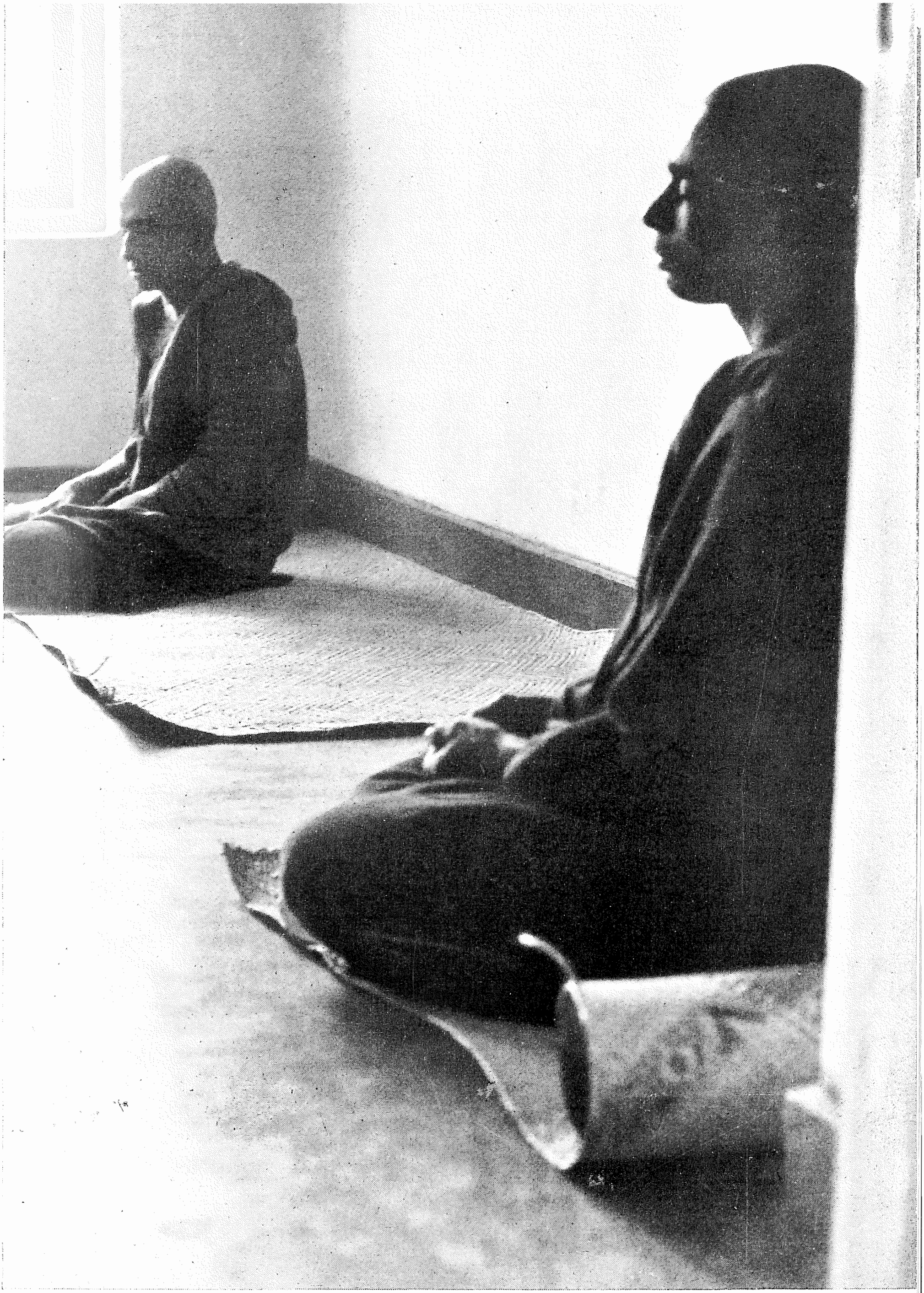
A monk's cell. Kuḍumbigala.



Monks going to bathe near Kuḍumbigala. A lay devotee in the background.



Monks taking afternoon tea after a sea bath. Monks do not eat, but may take liquids, after noon.



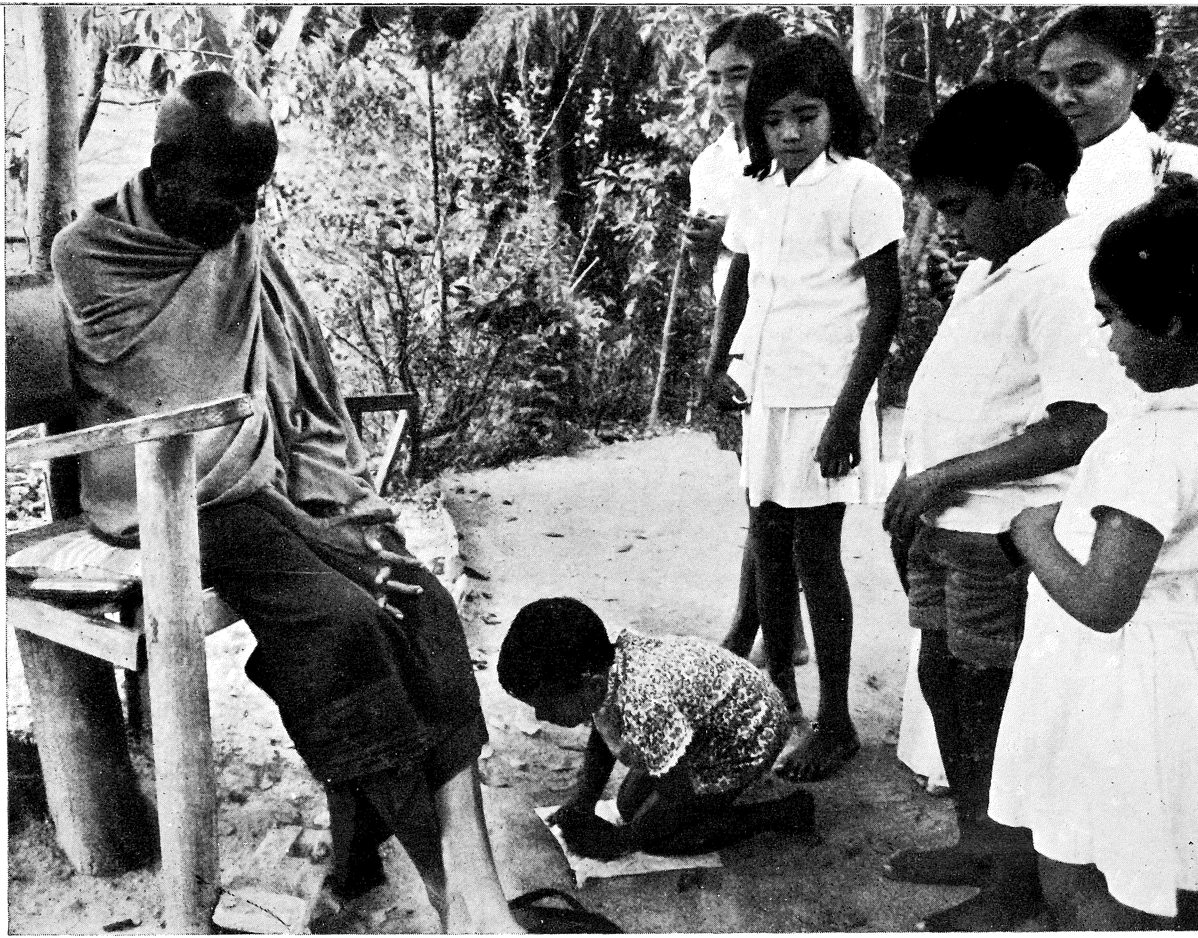
Jinavaṃsa (furthest from camera) and pupil meditating at afternoon worship.



The Venerable Kaḍaväddduvē Jinavaṃsa.



A class at Kuḍumbigala.



Jinavaṃsa and lay devotees. Learning to be a Buddhist.



Kuḍumbigala. The head monk (back to camera) gives last instructions before he leaves on a journey.



Ānandasiri (background) and his chief pupil.

than any discourtesy could cause. Hence many monks and their loyal supporters, who did not have close contact with those in power, made representations to government to quell the *tāpa-sayō* or to ban their books (either the books of Subodhānanda's group, or the books of the Vinayavardhana committee).[14]

It was not only the threat of their own disestablishment which aroused the temple monks, but also the possibility of the *tāpasayō* being legitimized—as, to an extent, they already were by the support of the populace. It evidently came as a great shock to the religious establishment then, when a very important figure indeed offered support to the *tāpasayō*. On 16 February, *Dinamiṇa* carried an article reporting that the Burmese General Tun La On, at Olcott Day celebrations in Kandy, announced that he would solve the Tāpasa problem by sending Tāpasa Himi to Burma to learn insight meditation. Otherwise, he said, the Tāpasa movement would go down the wrong path. He offered to provide all necessary support for the trip. Later the secretary of the Burmese embassy said that the embassy would be willing to provide visas, advice, and financial support.

This suggestion must be seen in the light of the preparations then going on in Burma for Buddha Jayanti and the Sixth Council (patterned after earlier councils of the Sangha to edit the Pali canon). Though more altruistic motives doubtless played a part in this, U Nu and his government made great political capital of the celebration, both at home and abroad. Furthermore the new Burmese method of teaching *vipassanā* (insight) meditation was in considerable demand—it was exported to Ceylon during this period—and the Burmese were proud of it. (It is essentially a streamlined method of teaching meditation.) The Sinhalese political and religious establishment, which had already branded the *tāpasayō* as being little better than criminals, were predictably not very happy about the suggestion. It was as if the French ambassador had proposed that he would solve America's juvenile delinquency problem by sending them all to France to learn French and unarmed combat.

By the following month[15] a hundred *tāpasayō* had gathered in Vābaḍa, on top of a hill, and Tāpasa Himi announced that they

[14] *Dinamiṇa*, 26 June, 19 July, 17 September, and 23 September.

[15] The following is from *Dinamiṇa*, 25 March, 2 April, 7 April.

would wait there, withdrawn in meditation, until the call came to go to Burma. A lay supporter also announced that Tāpasa Himi would take the higher ordination in Burma, as there was no one in Ceylon worthy of conferring it on him. (This is a belief spread principally by the Vinayavardhana people.) So many people came to Vābaḍa to see the wonder that a van service was started up to convey people from the main road to the village. For some time people had been following him about selling religious pictures, incense, and articles to offer to the *tāpasayō*, and now they set up a regular camp.

This was the height of the affair. Spectacular rumours were circulating, some of which assimilated Tāpasa Himi to the Bodhisattva of the Jātakas, others to saints of ancient Ceylon. He could speak ten languages, he could fly, his face was seen in the moon. Yet the affair was so volatile, and its real claims so modest, that it seems overblown to dignify it as messianic. Consider the title '*Vābaḍa Budu*' which some applied to Tāpasa Himi: it does mean 'the Vābaḍa Buddha', and might have been so taken by some. Yet *budu* is also an affectionate honorific applied to one's own parents without reference to their spiritual attainments. Tāpasa Himi made no such claim. He alleged only that he was Anagārika Dharmapāla.

Nor was there any positive vision of change which might qualify the movement as millenarian. The sole programme, if it may be so called, was the destruction of the bad old village monks. The atmosphere of credulity, scepticism, and confusion which surrounded Tāpasa Himi is perhaps best epitomized in this story told me by a villager. One of his friends had gone to worship Tāpasa Himi, and when the worshipper arose from his prostration, Tāpasa Himi had disappeared! The villager told me that on being regaled with this miracle, his remark had been that Tāpasa Himi probably stepped behind a tree to relieve himself.

Meanwhile Sir John Kotalawala, the Prime Minister, announced that it was the responsibility of the leading monks of Ceylon, the Malwatta-Asgiri Kandyan elders of the Siyam Nikāya, to deal with the '*tāpasa* question', since they knew what was proper for the Buddhist religion. This is a direct reply to the officious Burmese intervention. He also said that he had reports that there were at least forty-five criminals among the *tāpasayō*.



A monk prepared for travel. At Vaturuvila.

The *tāpasayō* gathered in Colombo in late March, concentrating mostly at Galle Face Green. As usual, crowds came to see them, and their supporters gained a reputation for rough behaviour. The leading Kandyan monks sent letters to the Prime Minister and the Burmese ambassador, saying that the *tāpasayō* had taken the robes 'by their own (arbitrary) will' (*hituvakkara lesa*) and were therefore *theyyasaṃvāsaka*, contrary to two thousand five hundred years of (conservative) Sangha history. On or about 7 April, the Burmese ambassador sent a letter to the leading Kandyan monks, saying that he was responsible for providing information about entry into Burma, and that so far no *tāpasayō* had asked for permission to go there. This amounted to a withdrawal of the original proposal. He went on to say that he wished to work with the elders of Ceylon for the elevation of Buddhism. Shortly thereafter Tāpasa Himi left with his followers to tour the south coast.

This marked the end of the Tāpasa movement. Thereafter the same drama of indirect confrontation was acted out on a smaller scale elsewhere. For example, in Moratuwa, a suburb of Colombo, two *tāpasayō* administered the eight precepts to a large crowd in the cemetery. This was hailed in a modest newspaper article (*Laṃkādīpa*, 19 May 1954) as an 'historic' occasion. A society of lay devotees went ahead with plans to celebrate Wesak (the anniversary of the Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and death) around the *tāpasayō*. The police intervened, however,[16] and threw the tents and decorations for the celebration out of the cemetery. They had acted on a complaint brought by the village headman, but it is also worth noting that a powerful Moratuwa monk might have had something to do with it. He had earlier sent a letter to the Burmese ambassador, protesting the plan to send Tāpasa Himi to Burma. This rather bolder approach to the *tāpasayō* must have been a consequence of the fact that there was opposition to them at the highest level of government.

By the end of 1954 the *tāpasayō* had disappeared from the newspapers. Aside from the official persecution, individual *tāpasayō* had all along experienced opposition and even violence at the hands of villagers who took the side of the temple monks.

[16] *Laṃkādīpa*, 16 June.

They were jeered at, beaten, and poisoned. The 24 June issue of *Dinamiṇa* reports that *tāpasayō* in Vādduwa, south of Colombo, were given food mixed with powdered glass, for example. I suspect that the main body of *tāpasayō* with Tāpasa Himi were able to travel about unmolested for some time longer than individual *tāpasayō*, but Sobhita indicates that, after the enthusiasm faded away, it was a 'terrible situation' (*bhayānaka tattvayak*). He could not go out on the roads for fear of violence.

Why did they fail? Certainly the most obvious reason was opposition by the establishment, but I doubt whether the *tāpasayō* could have replaced the temple monks in any very effective way, even assuming that that had been their intention. They rose to fame on enthusiasm alone, and when that enthusiasm faded, as it was bound to, the *tāpasayō* had little to offer. We have already seen how some of them were unable to maintain their meditative pose in the face of public scrutiny; by the same token, their ignorance told against them when they were placed in the role of teacher and preacher, which is after all the fundamental duty expected of a monk by his supporters. They could not fuel themselves with indignation forever.

But perhaps the most telling reason for their ultimate obscurity was that, however effective their ascetic practices were in attracting attention in the first place, they did not live up to the whole picture of a well-trained monk. Of the 227 monastic rules meant to be recited fortnightly by fully ordained monks, seventy-five have to do with matters of deportment and personal etiquette. These, and other rules scattered throughout the canon, form the basis for a training in personal dignity and cleanliness which is the very first thing taught a novice in traditional monasteries. Admittedly the novices may not imbibe the spirit of inner control of which these rules of etiquette are the outward sign, but nevertheless this public presentation is expected of a monk. Among these rules are some which, supplemented by traditional Sinhalese signs of honour and obeisance, demand that laymen treat monks in a way we might otherwise expect only kings or high nobility to be treated. Monks are always given a high chair covered with a cloth, for

example, while laymen sit on the floor. Social intercourse between monks and laymen is lubricated by the laymen's formal respect and the monks' personal dignity.

When Ānandasiri visited Tāpasa Himi one night he found him quartered with fifty or so *tāpasayō* in a coconut plantation. The followers were lying strewn about on the ground, which was littered with refuse. Ānandasiri told him that, if he wished to continue his movement, he would have to inculcate some discipline in his monks, teach them cleanliness, and get them off the ground. Similarly a layman who had supported the *tāpasayō* told me that he had finally been disillusioned 'because they were so dirty. They were always sitting on the ground. We couldn't respect them'. (Field notes.) Monks, though they live in poverty, are meant to do so with decorum. This was as true at the beginning of Buddhist monastic life as it is today.

In 1975 there were about fifteen *tāpasayō* of Tāpasa Himi's group who still persisted in robes. Some of these had joined the movement in the recent past. In 1979, however, many of them had left the robes, though one or two new ones had joined. Most of them are in the Kurunegala district, where there are many colonization schemes and relatively new villages.

One of Sobhita's pupils—Sobhita seems to be the leading light in the Kurunegala District—emphasized that they read only the publications of the Vinayavardhana people.[17] This identification with the Vinayavardhana must have taken place soon after the collapse of public enthusiasm for the *tāpasayō*. In publications of Subodhānanda's group in 1956 and thereafter we find that debates were held with followers of Tāpasa Himi. The two groups, whose compass shrank dramatically with the turn of public opinion against them, must have found themselves competing for the same audience. Subodhānanda's group charged, with some justice, that Tāpasa Himi derived his inspiration from them; while Tāpasa Himi, with some justice as well, must have argued that he was an original. The ideology of Subodhānanda's group, as I have indicated, is conservative, being essentially the same as that of surrounding village temples. On the other hand, the Vinayavardhana ideology which Tāpasa Himi's followers take as their text, is a mixture of modernist and fundamentalist doctrines, many of which are not found else-

[17] See Kemper, op. cit.

where. They do not believe in worshipping Buddha images, for example. Hence, at Sobhita's temple, where we might expect to find a neat, well-painted, expensively tiled image house with a glowing orange cement Buddha image inside, we find instead a small meditation chamber with a large meditation walkway, walled, painted, and expensively tiled. Inside a skeleton is painted in white on a black background for meditation.

Tāpasa Himi's subsequent career was rather more eventful than that of his followers. At the end of the interview, Banḍāra asked Tāpasa Himi whether there were any special events which had not so far been mentioned. This was his answer:

> At the beginning of 1956 I went to India and continued to preach. I kept to the *tāpasa* life. I suffered much pain and torment, living at the foot of trees, among rocks, not drinking, not eating. While I was there I preached in Tamil and Hindi. I walked 15,000 miles on foot and travelled 35,000 miles by train. I went to India five times. I spent four years and a few months in India and Nepal.
>
> In India the Harijan people have a very low place. High caste people do not allow them to enter Hindu temples. I preached the right path to them and converted them to Buddhism. At one time 500,000 embraced Buddhism.

Otherwise Tāpasa Himi is mentioned in the newspapers twice more. In an extremely venomous article in the 7 November 1957 issue of *Siṃhala Bauddhayā*, we learn that he had been arrested in India for travelling on a train without a ticket, and bailed out by the monk at the Mahabodhi Society in Sarnath. An altogether kindlier article was printed by *Siḷumiṇa* on 19 October 1958. There we learn that Tāpasa Himi was in the mental hospital at Angoda, brought there by 'a group' (*pirisak*) for fear he might kill himself. He told the reporter that he had been living the ascetic's life on the beach near Mannar (in the Tamil north of Ceylon) when it occurred to him to go to India. He travelled on the train without a ticket, he said, and when he told officers (at customs, or in the railway) of his mission, they did not bother him. The *Siḷumiṇa* reporter found him wrapped in thought (*kalpanākarī*) but otherwise of perfectly sound mind.

Today Tāpasa Himi lives a peripatetic life, walking around among his lay supporters or pupils. Village people still like him

very much, he told Banḍāra, and he, for his part, has respected them since he was a child. Hence he received their support in his movement. He presently preaches, writes letters to the government, and publishes broadsides in aid of his struggle against alcoholic drink. He is also conducting a campaign against mini-skirts (*mini gavum*). He would like to carry his message to the whole world, including Europe and America, and it would be a great meritorious deed (he told Banḍāra) if someone were to help him do so.

Purity in History

CHAPTER 8

The Reform of Oneself and a Few Others

I return now to the learned tradition of the forest life, to those monks who took their inspiration from the Jātakas perhaps, but their organization from the Vinaya and their practice from the *Visuddhimagga*. I shall attempt to reveal the fundamental patterns of organization, and of change, which have ruled the Sangha throughout its history in Ceylon. It is not, of course, that the forest monks have been numerically important in Sangha history—one doubts that there were ever very many of them relative to the whole Sangha[1]—but rather that they embody the ideals of asceticism and moral purity which are constitutive of the Sangha. These ideals very often contradict other parts of Sangha tradition, and conflict with abiding circumstances in Sinhalese, indeed in Buddhist, society—we have already seen this in the lives of Paññānanda, Subodhānanda, and Tāpasa Himi. Consequently, I argue, the entire history of the Sangha can only be properly written in the light of this conflict, as a process of decay and reform. Indeed, it is already so written, for the *Mahāvaṃsa*, the Sinhalese national chronicle, records at least fifteen occasions on which the Sangha decayed and was purified.

Our reformers, of course, present the decay of the Sangha as a result of moral turpitude. While I do not wish to deny the ubiquitous flaws of human character, I do think that the process of decay which they criticize can be shown to be inherent in Buddhism, the unintended consequences of its constitution. Let me therefore summarize, in brief compass, the origins and nature of what I have called the village Sangha, as a background to a discussion of reform.

The Sangha's constitution may be regarded as being comprised of three principles. The first is the archaic, egalitarian

[1] According to a Department of Cultural Affairs Census of 1971, there were about 600 forest monks, as opposed to more than 20,000 village monks.

principle enshrined in Buddhist doctrine and particularly in the rules of discipline, the Vinaya. The Sangha traditionally conceives itself as a community of fellows in the religious life. Even deference to age, which orders etiquette and provides authority in the Sangha, has egalitarian implications, in so far as it ensures that every monk, merely by surviving in robes, eventually commands respect, if not obedience, in his sphere. Though monks do form small groups organized by pupillary succession, effective control within such a group does not usually survive the death of the eldest. Another way of putting this is to say that pupillary succession works very like kinship, in that it organizes only small face-to-face groups. None of the efforts made through the course of Theravāda history to centralize Sangha authority have ever fully abrogated this principle.

The second principle is that which governs the relationship between monks and laymen. It may be characterized as an exchange. For their part, the monks depend, by Vinaya rule, upon laymen for all food, clothing, and supplies, and this dependence is reinforced by other rules, such as that which prohibits agricultural work. Indeed, even when monks become landlords, as some did very early in Ceylon, the actual acquisition and use of food and goods by landed monks tends to take the same form, that of receiving alms, as among more truly mendicant monks.

Laymen, for their part, depend upon monks for spiritual tuition; but very soon spiritual tuition was extended to include merit-making as an end in itself, and apotropaic magic. And indeed spiritual tuition also came to mean more ordinary tuition in reading and writing. Monks became the guardians of Sinhalese Buddhist culture. Moreover they were respected guardians: laymen prostrate themselves upon greeting and parting, and honorifics, often those used by commoners to address nobility or kings, are used in addressing monks. The relationship is one of hierarchical interdependence.

The third principle is that which creates the village Sangha: that is, Buddhism originated and flourished in sedentary, agrarian societies. Once the first two principles are given, from this fundamental condition all else flows. I will point out the most immediately relevant consequences. First, in such a seden-

tary society a monk tends to be dependent on a particular group of people who farm a particular set of fields. The Sangha is spread throughout the countryside, the monks of a village are frequently sons of the village, and communication within the Sangha itself is attenuated. Furthermore, as we have seen, monks are legitimated in the village by their ceremonial role, rather than by their moral purity or their ordination. They spend most of their time with villagers, and therefore share the latter's values and behaviour; and when they become custodians or even owners of land, as they inevitably do, they share the views of landowners.

There is, in fact, a gradual, unconscious, apparently inevitable, and in these senses natural tendency for the Sangha to become domesticated, so that monks are no longer truly homeless, either in fact or metaphorically. They become rather a class of landed literary specialists in society who share the same opinions because they share the same situation. This is the usual condition of both the medieval and modern Sanghas—it is demonstrably present in ancient India as well—an equilibrium state toward which the Sangha constantly tends. This certainly happened to most of Paññānanda's successors, and the same may be said of Subodhānanda's and Tāpasa Himi's. We shall meet it again in later chapters. The Sinhalese commentaries recognize this village Sangha as village-dwelling (*gāmavāsi*) monks whose duty concerns books and teaching (*ganthadhura*), as opposed to forest-dwelling (*vanavāsi*) monks whose duty concerns meditation (*vipassanādhura*).

The process of decay is of course composed of many different strands; but what is important is that, from the viewpoint of the Vinaya, the basic text of reformers, they all tend toward a relaxing of the rules. And likewise, reform is composed of analytically separable strands, which in practice are usually woven inextricably together. In the next two chapters I will distinguish two such versions of reform, which will then be brought together in the following chapters. One version is large-scale, founded on principles of organization worked out over a millennium and a half of Buddhism in peasant kingdoms, and concerns the role of the Sangha in such societies. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

In this chapter I will discuss what might best be called

fundamentalist reform. It is small-scale, relates directly to the Buddhist conception of self-cultivation, and is founded essentially on the old monastic practices of the primeval Sangha as depicted in the Vinaya texts. While the village Sangha has a self-conscious role in society, that of *lō väḍa*, the world's welfare, the fundamentalist reform Sangha is oriented toward the self-cultivation of its members and the observance of monastic discipline. The village Sangha is intentionally a class or category of society; the fundamentalist Sangha is so only unintentionally, and conceives itself to be an order outside society. Properly speaking, the Vinaya texts allot monks no role at all in society.[2] In their view the Sangha is self-referring and autonomous, and the question is rather what role society plays in fostering the Sangha.

It is no surprise, then, that communal monastic ceremonies are much more important to the fundamentalist Sangha than to the village Sangha. Of these the most important is the *uposatha* ceremony, which is a fortnightly recital, in solemn conclave, of the 227 chief rules of Vinaya: the *Pāṭimokkha* code. It is a ceremony which gathers the Sangha together around the central expression of its communal heritage, its discipline; indeed, if we take the *uposatha* as the functional equivalent of Christian liturgy, we could say that the Sangha gathers around its principles of self-cultivation, while Christian orders gather around their God. In contrast, the *uposatha* recital is not very widely practised among village monks (except among those who still preserve a relatively recent tradition of reform). Indeed, the *Pāṭimokkha* is almost wholly unknown to many village monks.

Nor will it be a surprise that the *uposatha* is also the expression of the Sangha's purity, its unblemished observance of the Vinaya. Indeed, at the *locus classicus*[3] of the ceremony, where the Buddha institutes the recitation of the *Pāṭimokkha*, it seems to be assumed that the ceremony was to be an occasion for the confession of transgressions and therefore the occasion for puri-

[2] The view of the monk as a passive exemplar is therefore to be regarded as a development following the naturalization of the Sangha in a Buddhist society; and indeed it is a view which finds more support in the Sinhalese chronicles and commentaries than in the earlier canon.

[3] *Mahāvagga* II. 1.

fication. In later practice, however, transgressions were to be confessed by one monk to another in private, before the meeting, so that every monk who entered the *uposatha* ceremony was already purified. This is the practice today.

This seems to be the assumption at *Cullavagga* IX. 1. Having gathered the monks to hear him recite the *Pāṭimokkha*, the Buddha stops and announces that he cannot proceed, for the gathering is not entirely pure. One of the chief disciples, Moggallāna, then reads the minds of the monks, and discovers the transgressor, who is described in terms strong enough to merit quotation. He was 'of low morals, depraved, impure and doubtful in behaviour, deceptive, no seeker though pretending to be one, not celibate though pretending to be so, rotten, full of desires, inherently filthy . . .' Moggallāna takes the offender by the arm, puts him out the door, shoots the bolt behind him, and the Buddha proceeds.

This is the clearest possible statement of the principle of organization of the fundamentalist Sangha, which, in the face of the perduring village Sangha with which it is inevitably surrounded, must 'shoot the bolt' and gather in its own purity. Note that the conduct of the Sangha's affairs—the carrying out of the *uposatha* ceremony, and for that matter, of any ceremony, including the ordination—requires the personal purity of each one of the participants. The ceremony is invalid if someone 'rotten and inherently filthy' is present. On the one hand, the very preservation of the Sangha as an organization is predicated on the discipline of each individual member; on the other, the most frequent and regularly recurring ceremony, the *uposatha*, preserves and inculcates that discipline. It is in this sense that the fundamentalist Sangha is founded on individual self-cultivation even in its organizational structure.

But the importance of individual self-cultivation has another consequence for Sangha organization as well: that organization must be small-scale, carried out within a face-to-face community. For the principle that the Sangha is preserved by each monk's purity is associated with another, that each monk is autonomous, as responsible for his own purity as he is for his own salvation. It is not easy to found an organization on this anarchic principle, and the Vinaya texts reveal the straits to which the Sangha was brought by the conflict of individual

autonomy and communal necessity. A good deal of space is devoted to procedures whereby a whole community—rather than a single monk in authority—censures the wayward.[4] There are likewise a number of rules which attempt to ensure that only monks within a certain relatively small area (a boundary, *sīmā*) are allowed to participate in communal ceremonies, and all those within the area must participate.[5] This marvellously ingenious scheme to ensure purity and harmony simultaneously is preserved by the village Sangha only in the letter, as certain very ritualistic prescriptions for ordination ceremonies; while the reform monks are in any case relatively so few in number in any area that it hardly becomes an issue. And for most purposes the limited authority wielded by elders is adequate for Sangha administration.

In any case the object of all these organizational rules is the *Pāṭimokkha*, 227 very varied rules originating from very disparate exigencies of Sangha life. The last seventy-five rules, called *sekhiyā* or 'trainings', involve the personal and public etiquette of monks. They bear on the monk's training in careful mindfulness, and they inculcate a grave and dignified manner.

Most of the rest involve the monk's use of his requisites, such as robes, bowls, and living quarters. Their purpose falls roughly into two: some are designed to foster *alpecchatā*, contentment with little, and therefore control the amount or kind of material goods used by the monk. Others are designed to prevent strife in the Sangha over such matters. In the case of these transgressions, as well as the trainings, the monk purifies himself by confession to another monk, or, when an article of use is concerned, the monk both confesses and forfeits the article.

The first seventeen rules are altogether more serious, and entail either expulsion of the transgressor from the Sangha, or a lengthy process of special meeting, rustication of the offender, and a second meeting to accept the offender back into the Sangha. I will dwell on these at some length, both because of their seriousness, and because they will shortly become relevant to the narrative.

The first four rules are *pārājika*, 'defeats', whereby the transgressor is expelled permanently from the Sangha. Of these the

4 *Mahāvagga* II.

5 Ibid.

first is sexual intercourse, which the commentary—vital to the application of the rule—defines as the intromission of the penis into any orifice of a male, female, or hermaphroditic human, animal, or superhuman being, even if only to the extent of a mustard seed. (The very imaginative commentary leaves nothing to the imagination.) But what is particularly significant for this rule as for so many others is that it is the monk's intention (*cetanā*) which is decisive: should a monk be somehow raped, and therefore take no pleasure in intromission, he is not expelled. The intention is conceived as a perfectly objective and determinable matter, and a cynic might remark that this could render the rule rather difficult to enforce if a monk were intent on deceit; but the problem is no greater than that of ensuring that each individual in a communal meeting is pure. Indeed it stems from the same source, the conflicting needs for personal autonomy and communal harmony.

The second *pārājika* prohibits theft, which is carefully extended by the commentary to any sort of shady dealing, even through second or third parties. It is, of course, the intention which is paramount. Modern interpretation of the commentary places the minimum value which the stolen object must have to fall under this rule at seventy-five Ceylon cents, or about three British pence, seven American cents. The consensus among my informants was that the first two are the defeats most frequently committed by ordinary monks; but among forest-dwellers I recorded only cases of theft.

The third *pārājika* prohibits taking human life. Both the monk who assassinated the Ceylonese Prime Minister Bandaranaike and the monk who instigated him were guilty of this.

The fourth *pārājika* forbids laying false claim to superhuman attainments, either magical powers achieved through meditation or the higher reaches of the path to Nirvana. It seems archaic, but it does in effect remove the Buddhist monk from that public competition for support from the credulous which is such a marked characteristic of Indian religion. I know of no instance of this rule being invoked.

The next thirteen are the *sanghādisesa* rules, which require that the offender be brought before a special meeting of the Sangha, rusticated (which is to say that he must undertake a period of separation and relatively dignified humiliation), and

then reaccepted by another meeting. Eight of these are irrelevant here, and indeed are of chiefly antiquarian interest except in so far as they illustrate points of Sangha organization I have already made. Two of them attempt to control the size of buildings ordered by a monk from laymen, and reveal the problem of property abuse so characteristic of the village Sangha. Four others deal with conflict and schism in the Sangha, an inevitable problem in such a resolutely anti-authoritarian body. Two further rules are directed at those who will not be admonished for a transgression, and imply that the procedure of *sanghādisesa* was also adapted as a last legal recourse when all other admonition had failed.

The other five *sanghādisesa* offences—indeed the first five in the list—are sexual. One involves acting as a go-between, and two others involve suggesting intercourse to a woman. These seem directed at the unbiddable, and I know of no proceedings in such cases in modern times.

All *sanghādisesa* proceedings I recorded were for the remaining two, the first two on the list. One prohibits the intentional emission of semen. This is directed against masturbation and homosexuality, and it emphasizes intention: wet dreams are not prohibited by the rule. Intention is also emphasized in the other *sanghādisesa*, which prohibits touching any part of a woman 'with perverted thoughts'. To my knowledge, this offence is confessed only by monks who have been in hospital, where they have been cared for by nurses. According to the commentarial tradition, should so much as a single impulse of enjoyment have arisen in the monk's mind on such an occasion, he would be guilty. And these days it is sometimes confessed by monks who fear that they *might* have felt such an impulse.

So it is not just a matter, at least in modern practice, of a monk purifying himself of deeds committed according to an impure intention; for some indeed it is not even a matter of purifying oneself of an impure intention; it is rather purifying oneself *tout court*, just in case. If the doctrine of intention were really fully applied and the practice of self-awareness properly cultivated, notes Ānandasiri, a monk should be certain whether he had enjoyed such a touch. In his rather sceptical view, many meetings for this offence are pointless—*pussa bińda vạgē*, he said, like opening an empty coconut. In other words, to the general

notion of Vinaya purity there is added a puritanical sense of personal psychic purity from sexuality. While we might infer its presence in canonical sources as well, it is particularly present in contemporary Sinhalese society, where hysteria from sexual repression is still a very lively phenomenon.[6]

Indeed, I wish to go further and suggest that, at least in the case of one group of fundamentalist monks in Ceylon today, this personal sense of morality and sin was the genesis of the forest-dwelling life and the nucleus around which a whole line of forest-dwelling monks formed. Under these circumstances the communal ceremonies are not only the method whereby Sangha purity is maintained, but whereby it is achieved in the first place.

I now turn to Asmaṇḍalē Ratanapāla, whose career illustrates my argument. Ratanapāla was born in 1900 to solidly Goyigama—high caste—parents in the village of Asmaṇḍala, which is a few miles from Māwanälla. This is just below the main pass leading to Kandy, so that it falls within the Kandyan cultural realm and, significantly, the influence of Kandyan Siyam Nikāya. Ratanapāla was an intelligent, obedient child who led his playmates in particularly pious play: they would build temples and stupas, would take the precepts as if on a full-moon day, and would imitate religious processions. His qualities and predilections marked him out clearly as a potential monk, and at the age of twelve he was ordained as a novice under the monk in the nearby temple. There he lived, learning to read and write, learning the basic duties at the temple (sweeping the yard, offering flowers, etc.), and serving his teacher until he was twenty, when he went briefly to a seminary (*piriveṇa*) in Gampaha. He received his higher ordination at the hands of the chief monks of the Malwatte chapter in Kandy when he was twenty-one. Two years later—he must have excelled at his studies—Ratanapāla went to Vidyodaya Piriveṇa in Colombo, a famous centre of monastic learning. There he stayed for eight years, until he took over a temple in his own village. If the hagiographical tendencies of Ratanapāla's as-

[6] See Gananath Obeyesekere, 'The Idiom of Demonic Possession, A Case Study', *Social Science and Medicine*, Vol. 4, 1970, pp. 97–111.

sociates have not led them astray—and I think they have not—then Ratanapāla's career until this point was wholly ordinary, but for two things: great piety, by which I mean his emotional commitment to the forms of Buddhist worship; and high intelligence, which enabled him to go to Vidyodaya and take advantage of the resources there.

In 1930 he finished his education and took up permanent residence at the Sugatabimbārāmaya temple in his home village. In starting his career as the village monk, he had his work cut out for him: the temple buildings were decaying, the villagers had no strong connections with the temple, and there was no school. Ratanapāla set to work energetically, preaching, organizing committees, and rebuilding his temple—in this he showed the resourcefulness that would finally take him to the forest. Within a few months he had preached twenty-five public sermons. Early in 1931 he organized a *sūvisi vivaraṇaya* ceremony (an all-night drumming and dancing show superficially based on the lives of previous Buddhas), presumably to raise money for the temple. In September 1931 he founded a Sunday school for the children of the village, and a society to run it. In March 1932, he founded another Sunday school in a nearby village. Meanwhile he was seeing to the renovation of the temple. The monk's dwelling (*āvāsa*) was repaired, and in November 1933 work on a new image-house (*vihārage*) was begun. He also started another temple in the adjoining village, Wattēgedara. Meanwhile he continued to take an active interest in the great pilgrimage centre at Anurādhapura, to which he had made a number of pilgrimages already. In December 1931, for example, he collected twenty rupees to help repair the Ruvanvälisāya temple, and went with laymen from his village to worship there. Meanwhile he had ordained perhaps two pupils (it is not clear from his diary whether he was actually responsible for all those in whose ordination he took part). Ratanapāla was to continue at this furious pace of activity with little interruption until he left for the forest in 1938. By the standards of the (village) Sangha of the time, he was a successful and industrious clergyman.

This bare account of Ratanapāla's worldly success, however, does nothing to reflect the inner struggle that led up to his decision to renounce the village temple. He left behind, how-

ever, along with his diary and some other personal documents, a brief spiritual autobiography, written when he was a fully established hermitage monk. It depicts his inner state during the early part of his career, and was written specifically to be read by his pupils and those who followed after him in the forest life, as an example and a caution.

The autobiography (*Magē Jīvita Caritaya*—'My Life Story') is unique in my experience, for it is the only attempt I know of by a Sinhalese monk to portray his own spiritual struggle. Autobiography, in fact, is a Western genre, appropriate to Christian soul-searching but wholly unknown to the Buddhist tradition. Or, I should say, it is unknown as a continually practised literary genre. For there is a sense in which there is a very good Buddhist precedent for autobiography: the Jātaka tales. Each of these is a story told by the Buddha of a previous birth, and as such each has a homiletic, didactic purpose. And it is precisely this quality which deeply marks Ratanapāla's autobiography. It is stiff and homiletic, and he describes the events of his life purely in terms of *sīla*, the precepts of morality, and the transgression of those precepts. It is in fact a drama of moral struggle which, at the beginning, is very like that of the Temiya Jātaka. One word, 'sinful' (*pāpa*), is reserved for the worst sins, mostly homosexual and homoerotic acts, and the association of this with excrement—one is reminded of the hell of excrement in Temiya's story—is close and emotionally powerful. Once Ratanapāla's personal purity was established, the struggle then turned to a different objective, to gather in purity with other monks, and to 'shut the bolt' on the impure monks, after the pattern of the stories in the Vinaya itself. In the interest of brevity I will present the autobiography in my own words, with copious quotation.[7]

Ratanapāla begins with his novice ordination at the age of eight. He emphasizes, on the one hand, his natural piety and his enthusiasm for the religious life, and records the enthusiasm with which he began his studies and duties around the monastery. On the other hand, he records that he was already compromised: 'Because I did not have the company of virtuous monks, associating rather with shameless, sinful ones, I became a sinful novice, with broken virtue.' It is by no means clear

[7] The translation omits some redundancy found in the original.

whether, at this point, the sinfulness consisted in merely eating supper, or whether masturbation or even homosexuality are meant. But his censure of his elder colleagues is strong, and it may well be the latter.

His first teacher died, and he moved to the village temple in Asmaṇḍala where he was taken over by a second monk. His studies continued, but here too he was no paragon: 'With respect to our virtue (*sīla*) we were thoroughly fallen (*pirihunu*) people. My teacher had no virtue either.' But his teacher was eager that he prosper in scholarship, and Ratanapāla was sent —he must have been in early adolescence by now—to a seminary in Gampaha. There he learned the ten precepts of a novice monk. But, he writes, 'Though I learned the precepts, there was no control in my behaviour.' He then returned to Asmaṇḍala, where his piety continued unbroken: indeed, he asserts, it was his trust in the Three Jewels (*triratna*), the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, that kept him from really serious faults in this period, such as 'intercourse with women, taking life, theft, and drinking'.

It is clear from what he writes later in the autobiography that his adolescence, which he passes over very quickly, was not really the crucial period of crisis and torment it might have been. In the first place, his environment, the 'sinful' monks who surrounded him, by no means inculcated a continual sense of wrongdoing. In the second place, his moral education and consciousness of the precepts was relatively tardy—relative, that is, to the consciousness his pupils were to have—so that he only gradually came to realize that what he was doing was specifically against the precepts. This said, it seems likely that he cannot have been without a sense of guilt through adolescence, for the sort of piety in which he was steeped does have a puritanical strain to it.

Nor indeed did his sins, whatever they were, really threaten him with permanent disbarment from the Sangha, for, as a novice, he could always re-enter the Sangha after being disrobed. But, if he were to commit intromission after his higher ordination, he would be disbarred for life.

The consequences of this grew on him only slowly. He received his higher ordination at the age of twenty, but there was no one to tell him about the Vinaya and the *Pāṭimokkha*: the

upcountry Siyam Nikāya, the domesticated village Sangha *par excellence*, was not much concerned with it. One monk told him just enough to enable him to avoid the *pārājika* faults, and Ratanapāla records his gratitude to him. He returned alone to the village temple at Asmaṇḍala, and there, he records, 'many *sanghādisesa* transgressions occurred'. This can only be intentional emission of semen; and through the stiffly proper homiletic prose we can infer that homosexual practices of some sort must have been involved, for he writes:

Since there was no one to teach me how to climb out of these transgressions, I grew filthy from the excrement of wrong-doing—not to mention the more minor transgressions I committed. The cause for this was that the very monks from whom I should have learned to avoid such faults fell into them constantly themselves. For fear of destroying my monkhood entirely, I remained free of the *pārājika* offences.

By this time it seems to have begun to prey on his mind. He writes:

I began to see darkly that there was a way of gaining purification from these faults, as Brahmans cleanse themselves of sin, as Christian sinners give over their sins, by confession. By association with ignorant, sinful monks, not receiving a true cleansing according to Buddhism, I committed innumerable *sanghādisesa* faults as well as minor ones: like one stuck deep in a pit of excrement. I would have to suffer endlessly in the eight great hells, as a burning, hungry ghost [*preta*], and wander in the forest of the ages with no saving religion [*Buddhāntara*]. All because of association with sinful monks.

In other words, he had just about heard of the process of rustication and reacceptance into the Sangha, though for many years to come he was not to realize that it might actually be carried out for him. In any case his distress must have been evident, for his teacher allowed him to go to Colombo to study at one of the two chief monastic universities in Ceylon, Vidyodaya Piriveṇa.

But there the divisive tendencies in his life were only exacerbated. On the one hand, he 'came to uncounted faults', and his 'association with sinful monks gradually increased'. On the other hand, he learned a great deal about the Dhamma and the Vinaya, and discovered more about the purification

procedure in the case of *sanghādisesa* offences. And for one so religiously inclined the learning itself must have had its own rewards.

But his sense of crisis deepened, for, as he writes: 'Though my education was a success, through the gravity of my offences the torment of physical disease grew legion.' Here Ratanapāla refers to an infection or infections—manifest first as a boil on the neck—which began plaguing him at Vidyodaya and would finally lead to total deafness after about eight years of suffering. He spent months in hospital on several different occasions, and was operated on twice. The attribution of disease to a moral aetiology is not the only possibility, but it is certainly a broad current in native diagnostic thought, and Ratanapāla apparently felt so guilty that he had no doubts about it. Furthermore, as if that were not bad enough, the disease affected his appearance: 'As the disease took root I grew thin as a consumptive, which disfigurement caused the world to despise me.' True, great value is attached to a sleek, even pudgy appearance in Sinhalese society; and wasting diseases can easily be referred to moral turpitude; but certainly his sense of personal guilt must have driven Ratanapāla to this interpretation. Here was displayed, for all the world to see, the secret vice which gnawed at him.

The disease must have begun in his late twenties, shortly before he returned to Asmaṇḍala to take over the village temple. Over the next few years Ratanapāla managed not only to foster the religious life of the village very actively, but also to bring himself under a measure of control. He records that

My association with sinful monks lessened. Because my practice of Buddhist principles gradually improved, my faith and mindfulness developed. I began to see to duties at the temple assiduously, advise laymen, read the scriptures, and perform work for the welfare of others. But because I did not completely stop associating with sinful monks, there was still no way for me to respect the discipline fully. After a little while I decided to give up all use of money. One by one I began to practise the other, lighter, rules of the Vinaya. As my faith and discipline grew, and I read more and more in the scriptures, my knowledge of Dhamma grew so that I associated with sinful monks less and less.

But he had not left off the habits which rendered him so

guilty in the first place, nor was he to do so without a crisis. And the crisis was slowly building up through those first few years as a temple incumbent. Ratanapāla writes: 'Meanwhile an incurable ear disease set in. Physical suffering increased. I took more medicine. As I did so, the disease grew worse. Because of the destruction of my hearing, my understanding of physical suffering increased.' He was learning, in other words, to understand the truth of *dukkha* by most intimate experience.

As his fear of hell (*paralova biya*) was likewise increasing, he finally took a firm decision to quit the intentional emission of semen. But he did not, in his words, 'return to life': his illness continued, and he was still besmirched by his foul deeds. So he turned to meditation, which was aided, he asserts, by the gradual loss of his hearing; and as he did so he fixed his mind the more firmly on shame, *lajjā*, the practice of which leads the virtuous to guard themselves against transgression. This in turn brought him to a clear and passionate aspiration: 'Because my understanding made me disgusted with shamelessness, a firm desire arose in me to live the monk's life fully.' He wanted, in other words, to purify himself of his previous faults and devote himself wholly to the pursuit of self-cultivation.

But there was no simple way to accomplish this end. Fortunately, he had avoided a *pārājika*, the punishment for which was expulsion for life from the Sangha. He considered the possibility of leaving the robes and joining another *nikāya*, so that he could conduct his life in robes spotlessly from the beginning. But he was barred from doing so now, for men with physical defects are not accepted for higher ordination (though they may remain in robes if the defects occur after ordination). Nor did he conceive it possible, in a Sangha which no longer practised the ceremony associated with the *sanghādisesa*, to purify himself that way. He was desperate: 'So, crying with streams of tears, "What shall I do, what shall I do?", I began to pray, founding myself on the Triple Gem. Day by day, hoping for a purification of my monkhood, I beseeched (the gods) for help. I constantly implored the gods that protect Buddhism for a way to purify myself.'

I imagine him seated, as I have seen other monks do, before the Buddha image late at night, when no one was about, vowing his trust in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. He might have

had a monk's orange handkerchief to dry his tears. The gods here, patterned on the gods of the Jātakas, are meant to respond to the moral earnestness of the suppliant; though it cannot have escaped Ratanapāla's pained attention that he was in no position to plead, like Candra Devi, on the grounds of his sinless behaviour.

'Then, founded on the Triple Gem, with the help of the gods, the totally unexpected happened.' A monk with whom he had been connected at seminary came to him and informed him that it was in fact possible to resurrect the *sanghādisesa* ceremony. This can by no means have been easy. In the first place, the canon and commentaries had to be searched for instructions on how to perform the ceremony. Then twenty monks had to be assembled—the largest quorum required for any ceremony of the Sangha—and they had to be instructed in the ceremony, housed, and fed by laymen. Furthermore, this had to be done twice, before the period of rustication and after.

The period of rustication is meant to be commensurate with the period during which the offence has gone unconfessed. In Ratanapāla's case this was adjudged to be one year, and at the end of 1935 he was re-accepted into the Sangha. He was jubilant: 'I will never forget the monks who helped me as long as I live. It was a miraculous moment, like the dawn of my monk's life.' Now, though things would by no means be easy for him, he was armed with the moral purity, and therefore the certainty, which would enable him to leave the village monkhood entirely and strike out on his own.

And indeed he *was* alone, for though the monks who had taken part in the *sanghādisesa* proceedings had constituted a gathering in purity for ceremonial purposes, they were by no means a unified group intent on pursuing the contemplative life together. They came from village temples and seminaries, and returned to them when the ceremony was over. It still remained for Ratanapāla to found, or join, a group of fellow seekers.

It was in this period, however, that he met the other monk with whom he would attempt to found such a group, and who would be his constant companion. This was Kehelpannala Sumana, a slightly younger monk from a nearby temple who

shared Ratanapāla's concerns. The two would sit late into the night discussing Dhamma and Vinaya. In the spirit of the thing it is precisely such relationships which must underpin any communal life in purity; it is such relationships which must be inside the circle of purity when the bolt is shut against the outsiders, the impure monks. The rest of Ratanapāla's life was to be spent in this double quest, to gather pure monks within and to shut out the impure.

The struggle began well before his final decision to leave the temple. Ratanapāla writes of his purification:

> It was a slap in the face for the sinful monks. They did not in the least desire my company. But though they did not desire my company, they still tried to tempt me with fleshly blandishments, in order to destroy my purity. They were not successful. My intentions were gradually successful.

It does seem that reformers inevitably conflict with the village Sangha, but Ratanapāla's uncompromising temperament could not have been very conducive to peace. He earned the undying enmity of his erstwhile colleagues in the Siyam Nikāya.

The village monks retaliated further as his physical suffering grew. In December 1937, writes Ratanapāla,

> Boils began to suppurate in my ears. I went to the hospital in Colombo. After two months in the hospital I recovered and returned to my temple. [Now totally deaf.] Because of this my expectations of life in the world were completely finished. At the same time I came to hear that the sinful monks [of the area] had been circulating fierce accusations against me. As a result the lay supporters were alienated, and the affairs of my temple were fallen into disrepair.

He discussed these matters with Sumana, and the two of them decided to leave their worldly possessions and go to the forest. In the spring of 1938 he wrote to Kukulnāpē Dēvarakkhita, a monk associated with Ratanapāla's Colombo seminary who had been trying to restore the hermitage life himself—though not because he in the least intended to endure the discomforts of the forest, but because he wanted to restore Buddhism to its ancient glory in Ceylon. Dēvarakkhita arranged for a rich and enthusiastic layman to help the re-

nouncers. A few days before they left, Ratanapāla had this dream:

I saw a huge flood near the Asmaṇḍala temple. I, and some other people, managed to swim on the water with the help of some pieces of wood. Without being struck by the [other] wood being driven along by the flood, we swam with our legs in the water. When we came to a place where the water was shallower, we saw a mass of excrement floating in the water, so we swam past it. While going along thus without fear, I saw a fine piece of high ground. It even had a wire fence around it. Thinking that it would be a sanctuary for us, we went there. As we went we were talking of going to see the hermitage caves.

The imagery of this dream is very conventionally Buddhist. Its chief themes are drawn directly from canonical sources with which Ratanapāla was intimately familiar. In the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* (M. 22) the Buddha preaches the simile of the raft. A man, endangered by a flood, makes a raft, crosses the flood, and reaches the safety of the other side. Though the full implications of the simile are not drawn out there, they are developed elsewhere in the canon and commentaries: the flood is the flood of desires which holds us bound in the world of suffering, while the raft is the method of release, and the further bank is the security of release, Nirvana. The excrement, of course, is sin, while the shallow water near the excrement is the false promise held out by desires in this world. I imagine that the fence around the high ground must express the secure isolation he envisaged in hermitage life. And certainly the fact that he was accompanied by others in the dream signifies the part that a community of forest monks must play in the ideal.

But though the security of the forest beckoned, Ratanapāla's difficulties were by no means over. First, there were very real hardships which accompanied the move to the forest. From July to October 1938, he and Sumana lived at Dimbulāgala, Gunner's Quoin, a great centre of monastic life in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. When they arrived it was deep in the Dry Zone jungle, far from human, or at least from Sinhalese Buddhist, habitation. Romantic as it was to live in the wilds in caves that had once housed great meditators and scholars, it was anything but convenient. There was no water near the caves, and food had to be brought by foot over a jungle track eight miles long—and for that matter the village

at the end of the track was small and poverty-stricken, so that their lay supporter had to arrange supplies from even further away. At the end of the rainy-season retreat the noble experiment came to an end, and the two meditators moved to Koṭṭāva hermitage, a small place founded by one of Dēvarakkhita's associates near Galle. They stayed there only three months, for they were then invited by some laymen in the home village to inhabit some unoccupied caves, complete with ancient inscriptions, on a hilltop a few miles from Asmaṇḍala. At first the two monks had to crowd together in one small and rather damp cave with their lay servant, but very gradually laymen improved the site until there are now about fifteen monks' houses, two Bo tree courtyards, two preaching halls, a library-cum-chapter house, an image house, and various other buildings.

But physical hardship is probably rather more a positive attribute of the forest life—at least in the beginning. The more abiding difficulty was the formation of a group of monks.

It all began well enough. Ratanapāla and Sumana were together, and they had the support of Dēvarakkhita and those of Dēvarakkhita's students and colleagues who were eager to reinstitute the forest life. Dēvarakkhita even started a special seminary for forest monks in 1938. A number of young monks gravitated to him, and, one by one, they undertook the *sanghādisesa* proceedings, which thereby became a sort of informal initiation into the forest life. Indeed one of the most spectacular informal initiations was accomplished some time in this period by Sumana: he admitted to having committed a *pārājika* offence, that of theft—it was over some very minor double-dealing when he had had his own temple—and he gave up his fully ordained status, to remain a novice for the rest of his life. (This debarred him from participation in formal acts of the Sangha and relegated him, on formal occasions, to a position inferior to that of even the most junior fully ordained monk; but it gave him a very powerful position as an exemplar of the fundamentalist Sangha's principles, and he continued as the *de facto* teacher of many pupils.)

Indeed, Ratanapāla was the dean of this nascent group of forest-dwellers. He was the first to have undergone the *sanghādisesa* ceremony, and was the eldest of those actually trying to

live in the forest. It was to him that the younger aspirants went to discuss thorny points of the Vinaya. But there was a vital difference between Ratanapāla and Sumana on the one hand, and these fresh recruits on the other: both the elder monks bore deep scars, physical and social, from their struggle to attain the forest life. They had actually renounced considerable monastic property; they were intent on self-cultivation to the exclusion of other purposes; they had cut their ties with the village Sangha; and they therefore had a clear and uncompromising view of the relationship between personal purity, self-cultivation, and the conduct of the corporate monastic life.

The younger aspirants were of quite a different stock. They had answered the appeal of Dēvarakkhita for recruits to start up the ancient and glorious forest-dwelling life. (This is chronicled in the next chapter.) They were marked only by their lack of expectations, for few if any of them were in the line of succession for a village temple. They had no quarrel with the village Sangha. They had, in short, no reason to discriminate sharply between the role of a monk in society and the life of self-cultivation.

And Ratanapāla was certainly fitting himself not only for the life of self-cultivation, but to teach it as well. He records a tremendous amount of reading in the canon and commentaries between 1938 and 1942, concentrating on Vinaya, the *Visuddhimagga* and the Jātakas. He wrote a long and very strict special rule (*katikāvata*) for his hermitage, and observed a strict schedule. He meditated from 6 to 7.30 a.m., from 4.30 to 7.30 p.m., and again from 9 to 10.30 p.m. Having once attained his Vinaya purity and gone to the forest, he was demonstrating the same fierce energy he had earlier evinced in the temple.

In 1943 the nascent reform Sangha gathered together in one place for the first time, to observe the three-month rainy-season retreat. The same rich layman who had supported Ratanapāla and Sumana at Dimbulāgala undertook to provide for them at Kalugala, a very isolated hermitage in the rain forest inland from Kalutara. Eleven monks and two novices gathered, and Ratanapāla took the lead. They gathered at a round table to discuss the Vinaya, and read the *Visuddhimagga*. One monk was undertaking his period of rustication for a *sanghādisesa* offence. They meditated, and gathered thrice a

day to contemplate the qualities of the Buddha, the normal form of Buddhist worship.

It must have been successful, for the next year they repeated the experiment, this time in a house belonging to a Mr Jayanetti of Välipanna. It had been inconvenient and expensive the previous year to support the monks so far away from sources of supply; this time the house was new; and it is especially auspicious and meritorious to have monks spend the three months of the rainy-season retreat in a new house. In its nature, though, this was a different sort of occasion, and one can surmise some deep changes in relations between the monks from the entries in two diaries, that of Ratanapāla and that of another monk, Ñāṇānanda.

The house was, of course, in a village, and whereas Ratanapāla had recorded a great deal about the previous retreat in the forest, he is very laconic about this one. He mentions briefly only the especially large number of merit-making ceremonies, the large number of laymen, sometimes more than a thousand, who took part in them, and the novelty of a loudspeaker which was used on one occasion.

The other monk, Ñāṇānanda, wrote several pages in his diary on the retreat. He preached often and at length, enjoyed the loudspeaker greatly, lectured to the other monks on Vinaya, and took some trouble to estimate the number of people present on various occasions. He loved it. At the end of the retreat he had so distinguished himself that he was invited by his fellows to receive the *kaṭhina* robes offered by the laity at the closing ceremony. For him, one of Dēvarakkhita's recruits, this was the vindication of the forest life—only it was not in the forest.

Early in 1945 Ratanapāla and Ñāṇānanda went together to the hermitage of one of their colleagues, and there they quarrelled. Ratanapāla was not satisfied with the others' standard of discipline, and the others—it must have been a terrible shock—actually accused Ratanapāla of some transgression. Since his diaries record, year after year, the triumphant preservation of his hard-won virtue, it is difficult to believe that anything very serious had happened; and it should be clear by now that any quarrel in the Sangha is phrased in terms of Vinaya, whatever its real content. Ratanapāla never again joined the others for a retreat, and they drifted apart.

Whatever the immediate occasion of the quarrel, two deeper reasons are clear. The first is the difference in the two parties' ideas of the monk's business. Dēvarakkhita's recruits did not, and indeed never would, sharply distinguish between the demands of fundamentalism, aimed at self-cultivation, and the attractions of the village monk's life. They saw no reason to 'shoot the bolt' on the impure monks. Indeed they were dependent on the Kandyan Siyam Nikāya's head monks, who retained the privileges of approving and participating in any ordination, which was to be held on their premises (in this case, Asgiri) in Kandy. So Ratanapāla's efforts to foster a small group of pure monks were doomed to failure on this account.

The second reason is this: in 1944 Ratanapāla ordained a number of relatively low-caste (*navandannā*) boys as his novice pupils. This not only enraged the Kandyan monks of his natal area, but also violated the sensibilities of some of his reforming colleagues. For hundreds of years, perhaps longer, ordination in the Siyam Nikāya and its predecessors had been the prerogative of the highest caste, the Goyigama. Though this practice has a compelling logic among the village Sangha, where the ethos of the wider society holds sway, it is manifestly contrary to the original universalizing ideals of monastic life. Never one to let a point drop, Ratanapāla published a number of pamphlets on the subject. Indeed, the one with the widest circulation, *Pävidi Kula Vādaya* ('Argument Against Caste among Monks'), published in 1948, spoke to the enthusiasm for reform that was then rising, and he received favourable letters from monks all over the country. But he received few from his erstwhile colleagues.

So Ratanapāla and Sumana were thrown back on their own resources again, and the village monks attacked: they let it be known that the low-caste pupils could not be given higher ordination in Kandy. Furthermore, when government registration of monks was discussed in about 1950, they announced that Ratanapāla himself would not be allowed to register as a monk under their aegis.

This drove Ratanapāla to seek colleagues elsewhere. He began to correspond with Kaḍavädduvē Jinavaṃsa, a monk of the Rāmañña Nikāya who was then starting a group of forest monks. Jinavaṃsa recalls the length of Ratanapāla's letter,

which asked many questions, calling for detailed answers, about Jinavaṃsa's ideas of the forest life. Jinavaṃsa's reply satisfied him, and they met. They stayed up all night discussing the matter, and Ratanapāla returned to his hermitage with a tentative decision to continue negotiations. He was in fact very wary, because of his previous experiences. He was eventually won round, though—probably more through necessity than by Jinavaṃsa's undoubtedly great powers of argument—and in 1951 he entrusted one of his low-caste pupils to Jinavaṃsa for education. And once won over, he was won over completely: in 1952 he went to live for a while at a new hermitage, Nimalava, founded by Jinavaṃsa's group. Ratanapāla had finally met monks to his own taste. They worked together until Ratanapāla's death in 1955, and Sumana and the pupils have been members of Jinavaṃsa's group ever since.

The tale of Jinavaṃsa's group is told in later chapters in great detail. They represent a fulfilment of Ratanapāla's hopes in a number of senses, however, of which I will mention the most relevant here. They are characterized by a particularly workmanlike attitude to self-cultivation, and have quite a remarkably clear sense of the dividing line between the practices of the village Sangha and the forest life. They make a great point of maintaining continual contact between the monks of the group, so that the face-to-face trust upon which mutual purity and mutual action are based is well founded. And, of course, their views on Vinaya are, by Ratanapāla's standards, very sound.

But even among this stern and serious company, Ratanapāla's attitude stands out for two characteristics. First, it is stridently and rigidly opposed to village Sangha practices in any form, and censures them in the strongest language. In his special rule for Mällagala Ratanapāla leaves no doubt that his monks are to submit every least act to scrutiny under two criteria, the prescriptions of the Vinaya and the bad examples of the village monks. This is partly a result of his character and experience, partly a result of his standing among the Kandyan monks, with their encrusted jealously guarded feudal privilege.

Second, his writings are peculiarly devoid of history. Though he was clearly aware of the events of two thousand five hundred years of Buddhism, and had a notion of his own place in that

tradition, his energy and passion for personal reform strengthened him, and he effortlessly stepped across the distance which separated him from his beloved Vinaya. Not for him any restoration of the glories of Sinhalese history, or any hesitation over resurrecting the original significance of the texts: he went straight for the main thing, primeval Sangha life, the small society of good and wise friends, *kalyāṇamittā*, seeking their spiritual weal together.

CHAPTER 9

The Total Reform and Unification of the Sangha

> Anointed to rule over all Lanka was the great king Sri Sanghabodhi Parākramabāhu, offspring of the lineage of the Great Elect, king of kings, shining with rays of fame which spread in every direction, enjoying the pleasures of kingship with the fullness of his meritorious goodness. Looking about him, he saw the sons of good family who had joined the Sangha, but who were destined, by the poison of unprincipled and indisciplined practices, brought about by ignorance and misunderstanding, to hell. And he thought: if a universal monarch like myself were to remain unmoved at the sight of such a defilement on the immaculate Buddhist religion, that religion would perish and many beings would be consigned to perdition. Would it not be well for me to serve the five-millennium long Buddhist heritage?
>
> The Galvihāra Inscription

It is not that Ñāṇānanda, who appeared briefly in the last chapter as representing a view of reform at odds with that of Ratanapāla, felt he was doing anything unorthodox, nor was he so perceived by others. He, too, underwent the *sanghādisesa* purification; he, too, despite his fascination with the loudspeaker, endured the hardships of the forest; and he was then, and is now, accepted by many as the very archetype of the forest-dwelling monk.

The difference between them lay in the fact that whereas Ratanapāla cleaved to the original constitution of the Sangha as represented in the ancient Vinaya texts of the fourth or third century B.C., Ñāṇānanda embraced, in addition, a later and quite different constitution of the thirteenth century A.D. Ñāṇānanda had reasons in his character and circumstances for so doing, of course, but he quite justifiably saw no discrepancy. The later texts represent themselves merely as explanations of the Sangha and as illustrations of the principle of Sangha purity in history. It is very difficult for a Sinhalese monk, who

sees the original texts through the later, to bring the difference to consciousness. But the difference is vital: in this chapter I will first outline the process of unperceived mutation which altered the constitution of the Sangha over one thousand six hundred years, and then describe the sort of reform inherent in the later view.

Let us return, then, to the original Sangha constitution as depicted in the canonical Vinaya texts, particularly in the *Mahāvagga* and *Cullavagga*. These texts are remarkable in that they contain a complete and detailed legal system. *Policy* is conceived as already established by the teaching of the Buddha: a clearly defined process of self-cultivation founded on personal purity according to the *Pāṭimokkha*. *Daily administration* is in the hands of monks who are experienced, learned, and elder. But *ratification* of important communal acts must be carried out by the unanimous consent of small face-to-face groups. Rather than falling back on straightforward authoritarian organization, therefore, the legal system of the Vinaya texts attempts, with a great deal of success, to preserve the principles of personal autonomy and communal harmony so important in the Buddha's teaching.

This primeval Sangha was spread throughout the countryside, and was composed of little cells, small groups of co-resident (*saṃvāsika*) monks. Indeed the word 'Sangha' itself as used in these texts refers to such a cell, and all the rules are meant to apply within such a cell; properly speaking, these texts refer to the 'sangha', in the lower case, and I will adopt the usage. The rules for one sangha were to apply to all of them.

Such a sangha, as we saw in the last chapter, was to found its corporate life in the purity of its members, and its corporate acts, not only the fortnightly *uposatha* but all others as well, required such common purity before they could be legal. Furthermore, each little community of fellow seekers was to constitute its own boundary (*sīmā*) legally. And within that boundary all co-resident monks had to participate for a communal act to be valid, and no monk from outside could be present while it was being enacted. As far as possible, then, the sangha was to be responsible for its own business as a whole, and every precaution was taken to ensure that each monk was likewise individually responsible. There were no offices of authority.

The rules, which strictly prescribe a boundary and participation within a boundary, represent a recognition of the necessity to keep such groups small and intimate, so that their rather optimistic trust in individual responsibility could remain effective.

In the nature of it these groups had to be continually harmonious, *samagga*. The ratification of acts in the assembly—for example, the admission of a new monk, the censure of a monk for transgression, or the settlement of a quarrel—depended upon harmony, as expressed by the silent assent of all present. An act would be proposed thrice (or once) with the statement that silence would be taken as agreement; on the fourth (second) announcement it became effective. On ordinary occasions the infrastructure, so to speak, of this homogeneous opinion would consist of the circumscribed but very real authority of teachers over pupils within the sangha, so that the system was quite practicable.[1]

Finally, the methods for dealing with persistent disharmony within a sangha were elaborate, but beyond them there was no method of settling a dispute. There was no recourse to authority beyond the sangha and, except for very peripheral roles,[2] there was no notion that laymen had any part to play in sangha proceedings. And there was certainly no provision in this primeval constitution, the Vinaya, for the sanghas to act as a corporation in the wider society.

Nevertheless the processes of domestication I described in the last chapter had already been set in train—parts of the Vinaya are directed specifically against such abuses—and over the next eight hundred years the Theravāda order was to respond to them, and to the inherent weaknesses of its first constitution, by developing a second one. The second constitution provided for recourse to ultimate authority beyond the sanghas, and gave the Sangha, in the upper case, a role to play in society.

In the middle of the third century B.C. occurred two events which marked the nature and direction of this change very clearly. Both happened at the hands of Asoka, the Buddhist

[1] See the next chapter.

[2] The two *aniyata* offences of the *Pāṭimokkha* require lay women to act as judges of a monk's culpability.

monarch who reigned over one of the most extensive empires, in northern India, that the subcontinent has ever seen.

The first was this: at a monastery, named after the emperor and located in or near the capital Pāṭaliputta, the monks of the sangha centred there fell into an unresolved conflict that lasted perhaps for years.[3] The monks may have argued over Buddhist philosophy, or Vinaya, or both, but Heinz Bechert has pointed out that conditions for such strife may well have lain in the riches available at such a royally endowed monastery. However that may be, it was impossible for the monks to hold a unified *uposatha*—let alone any other ceremony—and so long as the parties would not be reconciled nothing further could be done.

Nothing could be done, that is, according to the Vinaya. But from what we gather from his legends and inscriptions Asoka was a man keen that righteousness be done and be seen to be done. Furthermore, the scandal had erupted at a monastery endowed by himself, and among monks of his own chosen creed. He therefore took steps which would be crystallized in later myth and become the precedent for many such deeds. He consulted an elder of one faction and, acting in his person as king, expelled from the sangha the dissident faction, composed according to tradition of corrupt and heretical monks. The remaining monks were then able to meet in harmony and continue their communal life. Two things are to be noted here. First, the king acted directly upon the sangha in his royal capacity as protector of the corporations of society. This is in keeping with Indian theories of kingship. Second, aside from this interruption, the sanghas continued as before, governing themselves.

The second event occurred when the emperor sent the instruments for a royal consecration, and then a Buddhist missionary, his own close kinsman, to the petty ruler of a small island far to the south: Ceylon. This was the official beginning of Buddhism in Ceylon, and from the first it was marked by rather a different relationship between the king, Devānaṃpiyatissa, and the Buddhist Order. There was a single sangha, the Mahāvihāra, which was established in the capital and re-

[3] See Heinz Bechert, 'Aśokas "Schismenedikt" und der Begriff Sanghabheda', *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Süd- und Ostasiens*, Vol. V, 1961, pp. 18–52.

cognized by the state; and, if legend is even approximately correct, the newly consecrated king himself took a hand in delimiting the boundary for that sangha's observances. And the new king was expressly Buddhist: his legitimacy depended partly on his patronage of the Buddhist monks, as if in imitation of Asoka, though in fact Asoka's own legitimacy had never been so dependent. The monks, in short, were part of the Establishment. The way was laid open for this sangha to become the Sangha, upper case, the clergy of a Buddhist nationalist state. Over the next eight hundred years these two events were reenacted ceremonially and in sometimes bloody deeds until, reinterpreted, they became the core of a new and relatively self-consistent understanding of the Buddhist Order.

The processes which led to this formulation were very complex and can be followed in detail elsewhere.[4] The king continued from time to time to thrust his hand violently into Sangha affairs, sometimes at the behest or with the connivance of one party or another in the Sangha; but likewise members of the Sangha in the capital now became involved, even as kingmakers, in the polity. In internal governance, however, Sangha autonomy was usually maintained, and it seems probable, if not ultimately demonstrable, that ratification by unanimous consent was still used.

The most important changes were consequent upon the increasing amount of landed property which came under the Sangha's control. There came to be a role, that of *nevāsika mahāthera*, elder (in charge) of the monastery, which had in it the makings of an official office. Furthermore, because the Sangha was propertied the king had a vital interest in it, and it in the king: for the king granted such property, and revenue earned from the Sangha's property was in its nature denied to the king's coffers. This can only have created conflict between king and Sangha, and exacerbated whatever conflict was already present. It also lent an altogether greater significance to the Sangha's jealously guarded autonomy.

[4] See Walpola Rahula, *History of Buddhism in Ceylon*, M. D. Gunasena and Co. (Colombo, 1956); Heinz Bechert, *Buddhismus, Staat, und Gesellschaft*, Vol. I, Schriften des Instituts für Asienkunde (Hamburg, 1966); and Carrithers, 'The Sons of the Buddha in Ceylon', in *The World of Buddhhism*, eds H. Bechert and R. Gombrich (Thames and Hudson, in press).

Property also sharpened conflict within the Sangha, and changed the nature of that conflict. In the first century B.C. King Vaṭṭagāmini granted a monastery, with lands, to a monk of his own choice within the boundary originally reserved to the Mahāvihāra sangha in the capital. Try though they did to apply the Sangha's own remedies to annul this deed, the Mahāvihāra monks did not succeed—the offenders simply ignored their Vinaya acts—and the stage was set for twelve hundred years of internecine strife: though the parties accused each other of indiscipline, and of heresy, it was sheer competition which fuelled the schism.

And of course the Sangha became increasingly domesticated; its monks became the ceremonial and literary specialists of a peasant kingdom. These problems—domestication, strife within the Sangha, difficult relations between Sangha and king—must certainly have been the object of a good deal of thought and reinterpretation from the very beginning, but it was not until the fifth century A.D. that these reflections were set down authoritatively: in the *Visuddhimagga*, in the first part of the *Mahāvaṃsa*, the national chronicle, in the historical introduction to the Vinaya commentary, and in places throughout the commentaries. This was the Theravāda Sangha's second constitution.

Domestication was dealt with by recognizing two categories of monks within the Sangha. These were variously described, but on one side stood the preachers, scholars, and village monks,[5] and on the other the ascetics, meditators, and forest-dwellers.[6] The latter category became a special enclave within the Sangha, and the *Visuddhimagga* was composed as their meditation manual. Implicitly, too, the observance of Vinaya became the ascetics' province. This never became explicit, however, since the rituals of ordination and ratification within the village Sangha, as well as the domesticated monks' position in the state, required that they too be considered the exemplars of purity.

The ceremonial and literary specialists, on the other hand, now became the custodians of the *śāsana*, a word whose meaning was stretched and enriched throughout this period until it both

[5] In order: *dhammakathikā, ganthadurassa bhikkhu*, and *gāmavāsino*.

[6] In order: *paṃsukūlikā, vipassanadhurassa bhikkhu*, and *araññavāsino*.

revealed and hid a great deal. Originally meaning 'message' or 'command', and applied to the teaching of the Buddha, it was now applied variously to the scriptures, the Sangha as a whole, the Sangha plus all the religious monuments, or all Buddhists with their scriptures, buildings, and socio-cultural heritage. The nearest English equivalent might be 'Church'. Kings supported, protected, purified, or—sometimes—violated it. Without it, chaos and catastrophe; with it, order, peace, and prosperity.

The problems of strife within the Sangha, and of the relations of the king to the Sangha, were both referred to the tale of Asoka, which now took on quite a different colouring. In this version Asoka had purified the whole Sangha, and 60,000 evildoers had been expelled, after which the whole Sangha had gathered together in purity. Sangha purity was now a national problem, in other words, and it was conceived that it was the king and the king alone who could humbly but righteously intervene to unify the Sangha and ensure its observance of Vinaya.

This view, though it fell sadly short of reality and resulted in pretty dire deeds—monks being branded or executed—offered something to all parties. To the king, of course, it offered the legitimated use of power. And to the parties in the Sangha, all of which recognized themselves as the righteous, it offered the prospect of victory through state power in the millennium-long struggle for supremacy in the island. It was an immediately satisfying, if ultimately frustrating, doctrine which held up the happy ending of Asoka's purification as a desideratum to all.

But despite the occasional slaughter of a few monks the Sangha for the most part retained real internal autonomy and at least the power to reject the king's attempts to interfere in it. For constitutionally the king was also to be guided in goodness by the Sangha, and to render it reverence and support as a mere layman, if the chief among laymen. This doctrine too was referred to Asoka, in a scene from the legendary version of his life in the historical introduction to the Vinaya commentary.[7] A monk—and a novice at that—is invited to the palace by the emperor. The monk, self-possessed, modest but magisterial,

[7] W. A. Jayawickrama, *The Inception of Discipline and the Vinaya Nidāna*, Luzac and Co. (London, 1962), p. 41.

steps into the throne room, signs for the emperor to take his bowl, and mounts the throne to sit in the emperor's presence, without a word. And there was some truth in it: in ancient Ceylon the king needed the Sangha to confer legitimacy on him.

This was to remain the constitution of the Sangha for another seven hundred years despite its weaknesses. This later period, that of the Sangha's greatest material prosperity, has been ably chronicled by R. A. L. H. Gunawardana.[8] Here I will only observe that the lack of change in the constitution was mirrored in the Sangha's social, political, and economic situation to the extent that the prestige and institutional pedigrees of the earlier period had gained a great deal of inertia by the later, so that despite internal changes the Sangha remained unmoved and unmoving with respect to the king.

At the end of the tenth century, however, the ground was cleared for a substantial change in the Sangha's organization and its relation to the king. The Cōḷas from south India invaded Ceylon in A.D. 992, and reigned for nearly eighty years. This did a great deal of damage not only to the economic infrastructure of the Sangha, but to its organization as well. By the time Vijayabāhu I (1070–1110) had driven out the Cōḷas and reunited the island under his sovereignty, it was no longer possible to find the five fully ordained monks necessary to ordain new monks. Fortunately, however, the Sinhalese had earlier sent monks and an ordination tradition to Burma, whence enough monks came to Ceylon to hold an ordination under the auspices of the king—the first recorded instance of the king playing such a role. The old capital, Anurādhapura, was abandoned, and with it the centres of the monks' ancient prerogative. And Vijayabāhu granted new monasteries strategically spaced about the island to monks who would obviously owe their allegiance to him.

The now relatively decentralized and less autonomous Sangha was not allowed to settle into a new dispensation of privilege and independence, for Vijayabāhu's reign was followed by civil war, and Vikramabāhu I (1111–32) confiscated

[8] R. A. L. H. Gunawardana, *Robe and Plow: Monasticism and Economic Interest in Early Medieval Sri Lanka*, Association for Asian Studies, University of Arizona Press (Tuscon, 1979).

monastic estates to finance his cause. It was not until the reign of Parakkamabāhu the Great (1153–86) that the island was unified. Under him deep changes were wrought in the Sangha and its constitution. That he succeeded in this, where others had failed, was due in part to the historical circumstances—the destruction of the old Sangha's social pedigree and infrastructure—but it was also due to his personal momentum and statecraft, and to the whole-hearted co-operation of key members of the Sangha, who deplored the corruption and ignorance into which the Sangha had fallen during the interregnum.

It is difficult now to unravel what happened from what was later said to have happened, but I believe the course of events to have been roughly as follows.

First, Parakkamabāhu gathered a committee of elder, leading monks representing the different regional groups who had survived the events of the preceding century. The president of this committee was Mahākassapa, who traced his lineage to the Mahāvihāra, and who was the leading elder of the monastery at Dimbulāgala, a relatively isolated but populous centre of forest-dwelling monks. Mahākassapa was therefore a spokesman for Vinaya strictness, able to pontificate on Sangha behaviour in general.

These monks then settled their differences. This may have been done according to the procedure described at *Cullavagga* IV. 13, which allows for senior monks to mutually confess the faults of each of their parties as a whole, in order to allow the sangha to proceed in concord. But however it was done, it allowed later ages to speak of a 'unification' of the Sangha, a healing of the rift which had begun when King Vaṭṭagāmini gave a monastery inside the Mahāvihāra boundary to his favourite.

With the king's support and sometimes with his physical presence the elders then determined who the good monks were, and confirmed them in their status by an act of Vinaya;[9] and they ejected the bad monks by another Vinaya procedure.[10] To these latter monks the king then gave lucrative positions, to keep them quiet. The process was no doubt much more com-

[9] Perhaps by *sanghādisesa* proceedings, perhaps by a *dalhi-kamma*, a reordination.

[10] See, for example, the *ukkhepanīya-*, *pabbājanīya-*, and *tajjanīya-kammas* of *Cullavagga* I.

plex and equivocal than either this summary or the later Sinhalese tradition depict it, but the chief matter from the present viewpoint is that, here, for the first time, the king's power actually reaches within the Sangha and, with the elders' co-operation and by specifically monastic legal forms, regulates the Sangha's internal affairs. The phrase which appears in that second portion of the *Mahāvaṃsa* written after this purification, and which expresses the largest part of the new constitution, is that the king 'had the *śāsana* purified by a Vinaya act'.[11] The image is that of the king standing in the assembly—really, standing *over* the assembly—while the monks transact their business.

One of the implications of this new constitutional feature was that the king could likewise be present as both sponsor and legitimating authority at other Sangha occasions. And he was: the *Mahāvaṃsa* records that, year after year, Parakkamabāhu gathered the Sangha monks together to perform their ordinations in the new capital, Polonnaruva, under his watchful eye. From the point of view of the strict elders this safeguarded Sangha orthopraxy, but from the king's point of view it controlled access to Sangha privilege and therefore Sangha property. This was the beginning of that centralized control of ordination which became such an obstacle to later reformers.

But none of this could have been accomplished without a fundamental change within the Sangha itself. For, however effective the king's new authority might be, it was still too difficult to regulate a large-scale national Sangha, or to administer it day by day, according to the rules of a small face-to-face sangha. And so offices were instituted, the office-bearers being appointed by the king. This was a very real step toward resolving the tensions between the king and Sangha, and within the Sangha, and in this respect the king had won. The chief office was that of *mahāsāmi*, great lord, and the two seconds-in-command were *mahātheras*, great elders. In time the *mahāsāmi* even came to be called *sangharāja*, 'king of the Sangha'. This was a very far-reaching change, and each of the *nikāyas* of our

[11] For example, '*dhammakammena sodhesi saddhammaṃ Jinasāsanaṃ*', XXXIX 58. *Dhammakammena* appears only in those portions of the chronicle composed after Parakkamabāhu, and though the word is not used of his reform, it was clearly the substance of what was done.

day has offices (*mahānāyaka*, great leader; and *anunāyaka*, vice leader) which stem ultimately from this precedent.[12]

There was even an attempt to regulate the national Sangha within this new structure of authority by a special rule, a *katikāvata*,[13] promulgated by the king on the advice of the elders led by Mahākassapa. The special rule therefore had the double stamp of royal authority and forest-dwelling strictness. This rule enjoins a very strict way of life, but one in important respects different from that of the Vinaya; for it presupposes a Sangha of literate ceremonial specialists in society, which is so different from the Sangha of forest-dwellers. In this document, the second portion of the new constitution, such monks are given, for the first time, an organizational and behavioural rule specific to them. Minimum levels of education are set down, the discipline of monks in their ceremonial role is prescribed, and the newly official Sangha hierarchy is mentioned. The Vinaya was indeed the chief inspiration for this rule, and most of the individual rules are lifted directly from the Vinaya, but they are here applied in quite a different context for quite a different purpose.

Monks appointed to office within the Sangha by the king, state legislation for the Sangha as a whole, centralized control of ordination: more than any of his other accomplishments, this far-reaching change in the constitutional position of the Sangha bears witness to the power and effectiveness of Parakkamabāhu's rule. It is no wonder, then, that when the Kandyan elders were asked for the sources of the Kandyan constitution by the British shortly after the conquest of Kandy in 1815, they replied that it was laid down by Parakkamabāhu.[14]

The distinctions I have drawn between the different constitutions, however, are not drawn by the Sinhalese tradition. On the contrary, the texts themselves—the commentaries, the

[12] But even in modern Thailand, which has had a Buddhist king right down to the modern bureaucratic age, and a Ministry of Religious Affairs, these offices have not replaced the old teacher–pupil relationships with a pyramid-like table of organization.

[13] See Nandasena Ratnapala, *The Katikāvatas, Laws of the Buddhist Order in Ceylon*, Münchner Studien zur Sprachwissenschaft (Munich, 1971).

[14] Anthony Bertolacci, *A View of the Agricultural, Commercial, and Financial Interests of Ceylon, With an Appendix Containing Some of the Principal Laws and Usages of the Candians, etc.*, Black, Parbury, and Allen (London, 1817), Appendix A.

Visuddhimagga, the *Mahāvaṃsa*, and the *katikāvatas*—present themselves as being of a piece with the Vinaya texts, and each substantial change is referred to an earlier precedent of which it is supposedly a faithful copy. Indeed, this habit of thought is very deeply ingrained in Sinhalese monks: today much of their writing juxtaposes canonical quotations, commentarial glosses, and their own explanations without any distinction being made between the three. As a contemporary monk looks back, he sees Sangha history drastically foreshortened, and it all tells a single story, the glory of the Sangha's past and its template for the future. From our point of view, however, to explain the substantial changes undergone by the Sangha is to explain the polysemy and the deep ambiguity which have crept into the key conceptions of the Sangha and of purity. All of the Sangha's constitutions are still present as living images, and it is possible to espouse quite different visions of reform in practically the same words.

A good deal of this ambiguity is drawn together for posterity in the figure of Mahākassapa of Dimbulāgala. Whatever the truth of it, all the following are believed of him. He was a scholar, who wrote in Pali and Sanskrit. He was a teacher, who had a line of distinguished pupils to his credit. At the same time, he was a forest-dweller, with all the associations that that calls up; and a meditator, for there was a meditation manual associated with Dimbulāgala. And with all this he was also a great elder, a 'king of the Sangha' indeed, a man concerned and active in the affairs of the whole Sangha of the nation. He appears to later monks to have embodied, in short, all possible aspirations for a monk; and though we may wish to disentangle different threads of activity, and thus distinguish between the forest life and association with the king and court, for example, posterity in Ceylon has not found it easy to make such fine distinctions.

The chief figure of the 1930s who fastened on to the vision of Dimbulāgala and Mahākassapa was Kukulnāpē Dēvarakkhita, the incumbent of a temple near Gampaha and a scholar associated with the Vidyodaya seminary. He was acquainted with both the ancient glories of Buddhism and the traditional view

of Sinhalese history. He had lived and taught in Calcutta as a monk, and had visited the ancient pilgrimage sites of India which, like similar sites in Ceylon, were then being renovated. He was connected with the independence movement in Ceylon, which now held out real hope for national independence, and therefore for a new and much greater role in the state for Buddhism and the Sangha. He had travelled to Burma and Thailand, and was inspired by the flourishing state of Buddhism there; in Burma there were many forest hermitages, and in Thailand there was a Buddhist king. He must have returned to Ceylon by about 1934, for he took part in the founding of Salgala, a new hermitage. This was started at the instance of a layman, H. Sri Nissanka, who himself had spent a good deal of time in Burma. The leading figure in Sinhalese politics of the time, D. S. Senanayake, also took part; and he was likewise a supporter of Dēvarakkhita. In such a climate we can see how Mahākassapa's mixture of forest-dwelling asceticism and religious politics—mingled with the pious Buddhist nationalism attributed to King Parakkamabāhu—would have spoken vividly to Dēvarakkhita.

Dēvarakkhita himself did not have a bent for asceticism, however: he was well content to remain the incumbent of his temple and a leader (I believe, vice-principal) at Vidyodaya. He did take decisive steps to realize his aspiration, though, and in about 1938—the very year in which he sent his supporter, D. P. Samaradivākara, to establish Ratanapāla at Dimbulāgala—he founded a seminary, Vikramaśilā Piriveṇa, near his home temple. Part of the *piriveṇa* was to be a regular centre for training temple monks, but part of it was to be devoted to training a generation of forest-dwellers to restore the ancient glories of asceticism in Ceylon. To this end he built a number of *kuṭi*s—small meditators' houses—under the coconut palms at Vikramaśilā. This habit of planning to train large groups of monks is common to most modern reformers, and is a corollary, I surmise, of thinking in terms of the glorious past.

At first the only monks who came to use the *kuṭi*s were pupils at Vidyodaya, who would take a week-end outing to the relatively civilized amenities of Vikramaśilā in order to enlarge their experience by tasting the hermit's life. Slowly, however, a group gathered—the same monks who worked with Ratana-

pāla in his early years as a forest-dweller—composed of those who were actually willing to undertake the forest life. Among them was Vaturuvilē Ñāṇānanda, to whose life I now turn.

Ñāṇānanda was born in 1911 near Kahadūva, about twenty-five miles inland from Ambalangoda on the south coast. He was of a solidly respectable Goyigama family. I have been unable to discover any evidence of early piety, and have only this clue to his early life: in a biographical note[15] a schoolfellow wrote that the village schoolteacher singled out both himself (the schoolfellow) and Ñāṇānanda, saying that they should both become monks. I can only speculate that the schoolteacher was impressed by their deportment. When the boys took the school-leaving examination, they failed. Thereupon, says the schoolfellow, 'we saw that there was no obstacle to the renunciation on which we had set our hearts'. They would not, in short, be forced into some other career by their parents. To this day, I might add, Ñāṇānanda is notable for deportment, rather than for scholarship.

In August 1929, he went to become a temple servant (*äbit-tayā*) at the local temple, Kahadūva Visuddhārāmaya. He then took his novice ordination in February 1930, and studied with the incumbent. He took his higher ordination in Kandy in 1932, in the Siyam Nikāya, and then went off to seminary (*piriveṇa*) in the south, at Gonagala. This, as we have seen, is quite ordinary, and in itself promises nothing unusual. There was a circumstance in Ñāṇānanda's life, however, which, coupled with his natural energy and ambition, seems to have led to his decision to go to the forest: he was not the first pupil of the village incumbent, and was therefore not slated to inherit the temple. Though he might reasonably expect to live there the rest of his life, he would never be able to take on that role in the village which satisfies so many monks; nor could he bury himself in scholarship.

Hence, when we discover that in 1940 Ñāṇānanda, still at *piriveṇa*, began thinking of taking to the forest life, we can very well imagine that it seemed a more meaningful and attractive life than that he had in prospect. He had heard of Dēvarak-

[15] Sirinivāsa, Ambana, 'Abhiniṣkramaṇayaṭa Pera', in *Abhivādana*, eds Ñāṇinda, Dediyagala, Uḍuhupiṭiya Ratanajoti, and Pasgammana Ñaṇasāra (Vaturuvila, 1971), pp. 3–4.

khita's experiment at Vikramaśilā, and he conceived going to the forest after the style of Dēvarakkhita's professional revivalism rather than out of profound existential necessity. This is clear from a diary entry on 20 July 1940: 'I resolved to create a genuine religious group of monks in order to protect the Buddha's dispensation.'[16] I think he must have imagined a reformed Sangha in terms such as those of the old Sinhalese classic *Amāvatura*: '. . . the monks wandering on their meditation walkways after the midday meal dressed in red robes, like scented elephants in jewelled armour . . .'[17]

On 25 January 1941, he went to Vikramaśilā to study under Dēvarakkhita. He went without the permission of his teacher at the village temple—this must have been a difficult step—nor does anyone else seem to have approved. As he recorded, thirty years later: 'I do not remember anyone who gave me his blessings for that journey.'[18] Ñāṇānanda met a small group of monks there, perhaps five or six, who were very similar to himself: they had no great prospects either because they were not in line to inherit a village temple, or because they were not successful in their studies. There is, in fact, a still lively prejudice, found already in the commentaries, that monks dwell in the forest because they are incapable of intellectual work. They could not expect to fulfil themselves in the ordinary course of things, and were therefore available to the difficult appeal of the forest life.

Aside from a certain amount of academic work at the seminary with such texts as the *Visuddhimagga*, the young aspirants to the forest life seem to have educated themselves. One of Ñāṇānanda's fellows, for example, was Mänikdivela Devā-

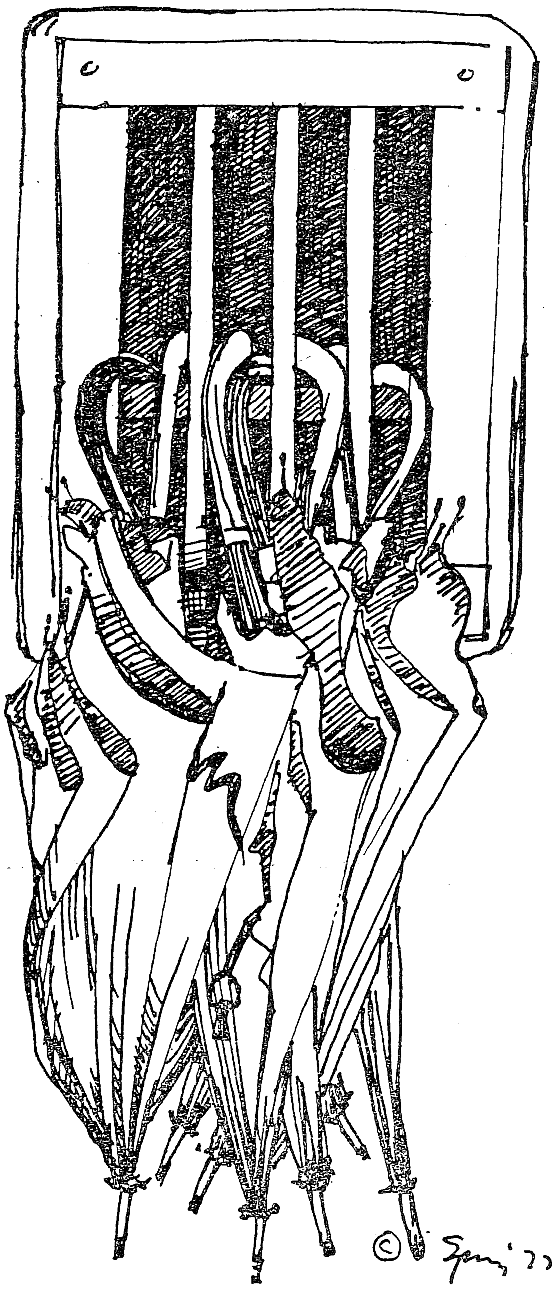
[16] The diary I obtained from Ñāṇānanda, with his permission to translate and use it. It was my first substantial venture into reading Sinhalese. Much of the translation I owe to D. M. Colombage, who patiently sat and read it through with me. I copied the English translation, rather than the Sinhalese original, though later, when I had the diary in my hands again, I checked the translation and copied some important passages in Sinhalese. The above reads thus: '. . . Sasuna . . . arakṣā gänīmaṭa śasanika niyama bhikṣu pirisak ätikirīmaṭa iṭāgatimi'.

[17] '. . . miṇikavada perevi gaňdätun seyin rat pahul perevi piṇi bojun vaḷandā mahāsakmanhi sakmankarana . . . sangun.' Guruḷugōmi, *Amāvatura*, ed. Kōḍāgoda Ñāṇāloka (M. D. Gunasena and Co., 1967), p. 156.

[18] 'Ē gamaṇata aśirvāda kaḷa keneku gäna maṭa mataka näta.' Eds Ñāṇinda *et al.*, *Abhivādana*, p. v.

nanda. Devānanda had failed an examination in seminary, so his village incumbent, whom he would have succeeded, rejected him. Devānanda had then gone to a long-disused temple on a magnificent site: Māligātänna, a rock eminence jutting out of the plain seventeen miles east of Colombo. The place had some natural rock overhangs—the caves beloved of hermit monks—so Devānanda settled down there, garnering his food by begging. Māligātänna was not far from Vikramaśilā, and Ñāṇānanda often visited Devānanda at home. They experimented with using their bowls for begging, and cutting their own robes from cloth offered by laymen. Ñāṇānanda then tried various natural dyes to colour his robes the rich brown which signifies a forest-dwelling monk. When he finally succeeded, it was a substantial step toward redefining himself as a forest-dweller, a member of a small elite which still existed more in hope than in fact.

On 24 February 1942, Ñāṇānanda left Vikramaśilā, having completed his studies of 'meditation, Vinaya, and Abhidhamma'. In June he plunged, not with whole-hearted enthusiasm, into the hermitage life. The Mr Samaradivākara who had been so eager in support of Ratanapāla, had continued to co-operate closely with Dēvarakkhita, and had purchased a substantial acreage of forest about twenty miles inland from Kalutara, on the south coast, at a place called Kalugala. This was to be a full-blown hermitage, and five monks from Vikramaśilā were to go there to initiate it during the rainy-season retreat (*vas*) of 1942. Then—I now give Ñāṇānanda's oral version, which has been polished by thirty years of retelling—there came an obstacle: some village monks of the area, feeling that their territory was being violated, threatened the monks who were to go to Kalugala, perhaps even with physical violence. The four elder monks retired from the field, which implied that no one would go. At this point the story takes on a legendary flavour, for Samaradivākara threatened to commit suicide if Dēvarakkhita did not provide some monks for his new hermitage: this is supposed to force the monk, prey to his own compassion, to accede to the layman's request. Dēvarakkhita then turned to the very junior Ñāṇānanda, and told him to go. Ñāṇānanda's comment to this was: 'Me? I never spent a night alone in the woods in my life. What will I do out there? I'm scared.' (From my field notes.)



Monks' umbrellas. In the rainy season at a large hermitage like Madunāgala the monks must bring their umbrellas when they gather for the alms-round before noon.

Nevertheless he went, taking with him one servant and an elderly novice from his home village. He lived in a mud hut whose walls, in the perpetually sodden rain forest of that area, never dried. There was often a puddle of water on the floor. The forest was infested with leeches. It was an uncomfortable, inauspicious, and heroic beginning to what would prove a remarkable career.

That Dimbulāgala, and all its associations, still loomed large we may infer from the ceremonies that marked the end of that rainy-season retreat. On 5 November a number of monks and laymen—presumably the Vikramaśīlā monks and their supporters—arrived at Kalugala. Ñāṇānanda preached to them on the 'noble lineage (*paramparāva*) of the hermitages': Dimbulāgala and Mahākassapa must have figured in the sermon. On 6 November they set out in a caravan of cars for Dimbulāgala, which they reached on 8 November. They solemnized the occasion appropriately—one layman took vows as a lay ascetic (*dasa sil upāsaka*) for life—and they left at two in the morning. The difficulty and expense of the journey convey very well the importance of associating Kalugala with Dimbulāgala.

In December, after returning to Vikramaśilā, Ñāṇānanda began the *sanghādisesa* proceedings, which served as a sort of initiation into the forest life. There is no indication of the transgression in the diary, and I have not been able to find out about it elsewhere. When Ñāṇānanda had been re-accepted into the Sangha, he went to Mällagala to 'discuss matters of Vinaya' with Ratanapāla, the dean of the group.

It was in the next three rainy-season retreats, those of 1943, 1944 and 1945, that the nascent group of forest-dwellers came together and then split apart, as I have chronicled in the last chapter. The split exacerbated the situation of the monks. It was, in fact, up to each of them to find his own hermitage and establish himself: with the purpose, to be sure, of reviving the forest life, but under the force of necessity, for none of these monks, children of a peasantry and a Sangha tied to the land, could consider being truly homeless. It was held against Ñāṇānanda when he left his original temple that he would become homeless and shiftless. Kalugala, where he did stay for several years, could not be his permanent home, not least be-

cause it lay too much under the hand of Samaradivākara.[19]

Ñāṇānanda began, therefore, to cast about for a site on which to found his own hermitage. The practical requirements were already clear: it could not be too far from the laymen who would support it, as Dimbulāgala had been; yet it must be isolated and, to an extent, comfortable. The religious requirements were equally clear: it must be a site, probably in the depopulated Dry Zone, which had associations with some legendary figure or event of the ancient civilization. On 27 June 1945, a well-to-do layman started to drive Ñāṇānanda and a colleague on a tour of such holy sites in the south-east—Tissamahārāma, Situlpavva, and Karambagala.

The night before he left on this trip, an event occurred which set the tone for the next few years of Ñāṇānanda's life. While he was preaching at the local temple of the lay supporter who was to drive him about, a snake crawled from the direction of the crowd onto the podium, and circled Ñāṇānanda's seat. The audience was disturbed by this, but he quieted them and continued with his sermon all the while emanating *mettā*—loving-kindness—toward the snake. It stayed for about an hour and then left. When Ñāṇānanda finally finished preaching, the monks and laymen crowded around him, announcing that it was 'a genuine miracle' (*niyama āścaryayak*). It was of course partially the audience's fear of snakes—and of all wild animals—which made them see this as miraculous. At the same time, in Buddhist eyes, the preacher's manifest self-possession and loving-kindness bespoke the very virtues shown by ancient monks, or the Buddha himself, toward all living beings. Ñāṇānanda was living a legendary role spontaneously. This magical colouring permeated his efforts to found a hermitage, and he fell under its spell as much as anyone else.

On 3 July 1945, Ñāṇānanda arrived at a new agricultural camp at Ridiyagama, a few miles from his goal, the ancient caves at Karambagala. The chief of the camp made him wel-

[19] Subsequently Samaradivākara turned Kalugala into an impressive monument to the Polonnaruva period and Dimbulāgala—for example, he had a huge rock inscription carved there, perhaps thirty feet high, which contains a message very reminiscent of the Galvihāra *katikāvata* of Mahākassapa. Otherwise the architecture and sculpture of Kalugala are rather more tasteful and impressive than most modern work, precisely because of the conscious attempt to revive antiquity in antiquity's mould.

come, and encouraged him in his plans to start a hermitage. The next day he went to the caves, and found that the site had been occupied until some years before, when the monk who had lived there had hanged himself. Nevertheless he would have to get permission from that monk's home temple before he could move in. He recorded that there were many caves and ancient inscriptions, and villages close enough (three miles away) to support a hermitage. All this made him eager to live there, but the greatest attraction was a capacious cave which had traces of religious painting on its walls and ceiling. This he identified as the cave of Cittagutta, an *arhat* of ancient Ceylon whose story appears in the *Visuddhimagga* (I. 104). Cittagutta's cave was decorated with exceptionally lovely paintings. One day some monks visited his cave, and exclaimed on their beauty. Cittagutta replied that he had lived in the cave for sixty years, and had never seen the paintings; for, as the *Visuddhimagga* goes on to point out, he was so controlled in his senses that he had never lifted his eyes to look at them. Later his fame reached the king, who invited him to the capital. When he did not go, the king had the breasts of all the nursing mothers of the kingdom sealed off, on hearing of which the monk, driven by compassion for the infants, acceded and went to the capital. However, the king realized that Cittagutta was not happy there, and gave him leave to return to his cave. On the very night of his return, he achieved arhatship, while gods stood around holding torches.

That a saint had lived in the cave was exciting enough for Ñāṇānanda, but that it was this saint, who displayed such remarkable (and, as other monks have pointed out, impractical) asceticism, made the place irresistible to him. (I might note that there is no way of telling whether this was in fact Cittagutta's cave: a fellow of Ñāṇānanda's, who had been present for the round-table discussions of the *Visuddhimagga* at Kalugala, likewise found Cittagutta's cave—in quite a different part of the island—and settled there.) Furthermore, just as his departure for Karambagala was preceded by a wonder, so, on his first night there, he saw a miraculous dream. While sleeping on a stone slab, he dreamt that a band of white-garbed laymen came to him and told him not to sleep there, for it was the path

of leopards. The next day he found—presumably by some spoor—that this was indeed the case. There was no doubt in Ñāṇānanda's mind: Karambagala would be his hermitage.

The rainy-season retreat of 1945 was the the last he spent at Kalugala. The year was remarkable for two things: first he managed a pilgrimage to India, which he records fully in his diary. That laymen were willing to pay for this is a sign of the esteem in which he was held. Second, he travelled around to some of the other hermitages in the island to exchange views with long-established forest-dwellers. He visited Nyanatiloka at the Island Hermitage, and the head monk at Kirinda (of the Rāmañña Nikāya). It is clear that, by this time, Ñāṇānanda considered himself, with some justice, a fully-qualified member of the greater company of forest-dwellers. He had also taken to instructing monks and laymen in meditation.

On 31 March 1946, he went to Karambagala, as his diary puts it, to 'rest, meditate, and make Karambagala a fully equipped meditation monastery (*yogāśramaya*)'. By 7 April, Karambagala was well under way: he had given a meditation topic to his closest lay-follower (and servant), and an important layman of the area had volunteered to build the necessary buildings. Through April affairs prospered, and he even travelled elsewhere in the area to look at other hermitage sites—the new generation of forest-dwellers would certainly need more than one hermitage, and the laymen of this developing area were eager to have their own monks. (Here, of course, lies a potent source of confusion: fundamentally, the lay supporters expected the hermits to be their village monks, and Ñāṇānanda never fully disabused them of the notion.) Then, on 2 May, the blow fell: Ñāṇānanda went to ask permission of the monk who had inherited Karambagala, and was refused. This placed him, always punctilious in observance of Sangha etiquette, in the position of an interloper. He had no choice but to leave.

At this point in retelling his story, Ñāṇānanda usually leaves a dramatic pause, and one can well see why—it was the abrupt end of his aspirations. However—and here the story picks up again, the audience smiles—his chief lay supporter, with his servant, unwilling to see him leave, came to him, pointed to a nearby hill, and said, 'There are caves on that hill; you can

establish a hermitage there.' (Field notes.) The hill was called Madunāgala, and it was to become Ñāṇānanda's first foundation.

Madunāgala could in fact boast a few inscriptions, and several relatively convenient caves—but none of these had had houses built under them, nor had the area been cleared. The largest cave was used by hunters to dry their meat—Ñāṇānanda was proud to put a stop to that. When he moved in to spend his first night in a cave poised above the jungle in a rock face, for safety, his circumstances were more ascetic than he had yet experienced. These days produced a number of tales of encounters with animals which were sufficiently striking to have been painted on the walls of the temple at Ñāṇānanda's second foundation, at Vaturuvila. Though these experiences are reminiscent of the commentaries or the Jātakas come alive—as of a wounded cobra they nursed back to health, for example[20]—they nevertheless have some basis in truth.

Another tale of the founding of Madunāgala which is still current is almost totally false. I was told this first by a well-educated gentleman in Colombo, who represented it as being a widely-held belief. Ñāṇānanda first went to the jungle (goes the story) to find a wholly isolated spot in which to meditate. This he discovered at Madunāgala. He took with him a bottle of *ghee* (clarified butter) and a handkerchief. Whenever he could no longer resist the pangs of hunger, he would dip the handkerchief in the ghee and suck on it. He had been there no one knows how long when some villagers, trekking through the jungle, happened on him, and fell down in wonder to worship him.

Beginning in May 1946, Madunāgala's development was very similar to Mällagala's: Ñāṇānanda's reputation spread, and as it did so, lay supporters materialized out of the surrounding villages and towns—some even came from Colombo and Kandy. Wells had to be dug, paths cleared, a preaching hall built. Ñāṇānanda inspired his lay helpers at the hermitage to zeal in the enterprise, and he lost no opportunity to preach on the great mission of restoring the forest life in Ceylon. Most days at the hermitage are not recorded in the diary, and these I suppose to have been relatively quiet, filled with the tasks of

[20] It suggests, perhaps, the *Bhūridatta Jātaka*, No. 543.

forest life. On a few days he records his pupils', and his own, progress in meditation. Yet for most of the diary, down to its end in late 1948, he records group after group coming to build or donate something.

On 26 October 1946, a new current of events enters the diary. Some time previously Ñāṇānanda had sent a letter to the government requesting that the land at Madunāgala be made over to him—or to the Sangha. This was a necessary step, since all land not in private or Sangha hands was crown land, belonging to the state. On the date in question, the District Revenue Officers for Ambalantota and Hambantota came to inspect the hermitage, and told Ñāṇānanda to go ahead with the work, that he need not wait for permission. This, he wrote, was a great encouragement for his lay supporters. Yet it did not yet constitute official permission, and until he had that, he could not rest.

On 27 February 1947, another figure enters the diary: D. S. Senanayake. At that time Senanayake was the Minister of Lands and Agriculture, and thus ultimately responsible for such matters as freeing Madunāgala for the monks. He was more than that, though: with Independence near, he was the most likely person to be first Prime Minister of an independent Ceylon. He was, in Ñāṇānanda's words, 'like a king'. (Field notes.) This judgement was echoed by other laymen to whom I spoke. I raise the point, of course, in order to suggest the extent to which Ñāṇānanda may have construed events at the time in a legendary light. An entry in Ratanapāla's diary for 1944, when Independence was already promised, sheds some light on the question. In a ceremony of worship in which he was wishing welfare and merit in several directions, Ratanapāla 'wished for a suitable king to protect the Sinhalese race and the Buddhist religion'.[21] I mean to suggest that Senanayake was not only 'like a king', but that to such (politically naïve) monks as Ratanapāla and Ñāṇānanda, he was very close to being a king.[22]

Here I will turn to a dream which Ñāṇānanda had during

[21] '. . . budu sasuna hā siṃhala jātiya räka gänīmaṭa nisi rajeku pata . . .'

[22] The persistent nostalgia of Sinhalese monks for the days of royal protection is documented by Kitsiri Malalgoda. See his *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society, 1750–1900*, *passim.*

this period: a dream which he called 'wondrous' (*pudumayi*; field notes). The background to the dream is this: after the February 1947 petition to Senanayake, Ñāṇānanda continued to approach the government on the issue. Notably, on 30 June 1947, he sent a registered letter to Senanayake, putting his request again. Then, on 23 July—it is not difficult to see that the matter was foremost in his mind—he dreamt of Senanayake. Unfortunately I cannot recount the whole dream, on ethical grounds, but there are two salient points. First, Senanayake appears with a train of ministers and officers (*ämätiyō, nīladārīhu*) which suggests royal pomp; and second, Senanayake proposes a close and continuing relationship with Ñāṇānanda. Though it is not necessarily to be construed as a modern version of King Parakkamabāhu and Mahākassapa, it nevertheless suggests the relationship of patronage between secular power and the Sangha which seems so desirable in the monks' eyes.

As with many of his dreams, Ñāṇānanda took this as prophetic, and four days later he sent registered letters to D. S. Senanayake, the Land Commissioner, and the Archaeological Commissioner. On 29 September 1947, he records that he learned on that day of Senanayake's election as Prime Minister, and was very happy with the news. On 15 October 1947, he dreamt of Senanayake again, and this time his anxiety over the hermitage was very plain. In the dream he went to speak to Senanayake about the hermitage land, but before he could do so, another monk caught the Prime Minister's ear, and spoke of giving Madunāgala to him instead.

Still, however high were the aspirations which led him on, Ñāṇānanda's immediate problem was simply to establish a hermitage with whatever help he could find, in a poor and isolated corner of the island.

I have so far emphasized Ñāṇānanda's initiative in this, but in fact the case is much more complicated: the tale of his going to the woods with a bottle of *ghee* epitomizes the monk's passivity as enshrined in both Vinaya rule and, to an extent, public expectation. That passivity in turn is assumed to be the outward expression of the monk's inward concern with his own purity. A simplistic moral judgement, of a kind often made in Ceylon, would have it that a monk cannot be concerned with

both his inner life and the world; and indeed I have said that there are inevitable conflicts. But, conflicts though there may be, the concern with purity and the concern with religious accomplishment in the world are inextricably bound together, especially for Ñāṇānanda, as the following dream reveals very well. He had the dream early in the morning of 2 September 1947—the period when he was greatly concerned with the fate of Madunāgala. It occurred after a series of well-attended ceremonies at the hermitage the day before, during which he ordained a new pupil, and a group of lay supporters laid the foundations for some new *kuṭis*.

A large crowd of us went to a railway station to go to a distant place. As there were too many people, we could not board the first train, but we boarded the second one. I did not go. I was walking to my village, and somewhere near Māvittavatta [a place near the village] I decided to have a bath. I put on a beautiful Burmese bathing sarong [an article of wear for monks], and went along the road bathing. Then in various places I saw young women in shorts soaping themselves and bathing. I was overcome with shame [Sinh. *lajjāva*], so I hid my soap under a rock near a well, and continued to bathe in a simple manner [Sinh. *alpeccha vidiyen*, or 'in a manner of being contented with little']. I continued bathing and walking. Somewhere near the [village] co-operative store [I saw] a large crowd approaching, including some high government officials. [Among them] four people were carrying on high a bier on which there was a corpse. They put it down by me, and I asked, 'Who is this?' They said that the hoodlum of the area had been murdered, and they were carrying him back. Then the corpse spoke up and said to me, 'Don't keep me here, since the people will crowd around.'

Then the morning bell rang and Ñāṇānanda woke up.

The setting of the dream is established by the presence of the crowd at the beginning and the end. That very day Ñāṇānanda had been face to face with a crowd much of the time; and in general I might say that the dream is about (if it is permissible to say that a dream is *about* anything) the relationship between Ñāṇānanda and his crowd of actual or potential lay supporters.

After the initial movement at the railway station, which reflects the confusion of the day's business, the dream goes into a second movement, the central action. Ñāṇānanda finds himself walking along the road near home, alone. His loneliness here stands in contrast to the confusion of the crowd, but it is

not solitude, for the Sinhalese countryside, and particularly that along the road near Ñāṇānanda's home, is densely populated, set in a dispersed settlement pattern. He then decides to bathe, and puts on a Burmese bathing sarong. The Burmese sarong is, in Sinhalese eyes, a particularly elegant version of a common article for monks—Ñāṇānanda presented one to Ratanapāla on the occasion of Ñāṇānanda's reacceptance after rustication. Furthermore it is associated with asceticism to the extent that Burma is felt to have many forest monks, and even saints.

That Ñāṇānanda should be thus attired in splendour, bathing, and walking, is one of the most dream-like features of the plot. Still, though Sinhalese do not bathe on the high road, they do bathe in public, at open wells dotted around the countryside. Men cover at least their genitals to bathe, women are covered from armpit to knee. At first, then, Ñāṇānanda's public bathing suggests a proper display of cleanliness; and it is possible to infer that he thereby displays his moral purity as well, but this is not fully manifest until the next, decisive act.

Ñāṇānanda's encounter with the bathing women is the central event of the dream. It is both implicitly and explicitly sexual. It is implicitly so in that monks are specifically prohibited by Vinaya rule from bathing with women. Since it is a relatively intimate activity, in bathing places for lay people at hermitages—such as at Ñāṇānanda's Vaturuvila, where busloads of people come to offer food to the monks—separate enclosures are provided for men and women. More explicit is the women's attire. Sinhalese women, though they may nowadays be seen in short dresses (Sinh. *mini gavum*—an abomination to, among others, Tāpasa Himi) are never seen in shorts, even in Colombo. Moreover women never come into the presence of monks except in long skirts or saris. The sight of the women, then, is all the more obscene for Ñāṇānanda's being a monk.

He reacts to the women with fitting modesty. The word used here—*lajjāva*—denotes something stronger than the mild virtue we mean by modesty, however. For laymen, and particularly women, it means a whole complex of shyness, moral discipline, and moral taboo which produces appropriate behaviour in a repressive society. He had already imbibed this spirit with his mother's milk. Beyond that, *lajjāva* signifies the whole system of

monastic discipline, particularly as it touches social relations. Elsewhere in the diary, when Ñāṇānanda writes of himself instructing other monks in Vinaya, he refers to the subject as *lajjādharma*—the constituents of propriety. His reaction to the women, then, is partially composed of guilt, as the product of childhood training; and partially of monastic circumspection, as the result of his training as a monk.

Because of *lajjāva*, Ñāṇānanda hides his soap under a rock by a well. To minds sensitized by two generations of psychoanalysis, this image is suggestive of some profoundly sexual meaning, which would, however, take us beyond the immediately relevant: the hiding of the soap. (In any case it is not unusual to keep one's soap hidden under a rock by the well.) The soap is suddenly revealed to be associated with sensuality, because of the inherent sensuality of bathing, and because of its use in the dream by the erotic women. It is therefore done away with, and Ñāṇānanda continues bathing *alpeccha vidiyen*, contented with little. This virtue of constraint in material things—*alpecchatā*—corresponds to *lajjāva*, constraint with respect to people, both being expressions of the basic Buddhist condemnation of *taṇhā*, thirst or desire. For a Buddhist the connection would be made automatically. Furthermore, that the soap was only hidden, rather than discarded, reveals a very important feature of *taṇhā*: it arises again and again, and a monk must constantly struggle with it.

The last movement reverts to the central theme, the outward display of discipline, and suggests what the inward consequences of a concern with such a display might be. In some of Ñāṇānanda's other dreams there appears an association between criminals or criminality and corpses, and it is very likely that what brings them together is the quality of pollution. Just as crimes and sin are polluting in a moral sense, so is a corpse polluting in a physical sense: in Sinhalese belief one may catch an infectious disease from a corpse, and rituals of purification surround the disposal of the dead. The presentation of the corpse to Ñāṇānanda, therefore, is the representation of what was earlier being continually washed away or, as dream-like ambiguity affected the action, hidden. And the express desire of the corpse to be taken away from the crowd repeats the need for such concealment. The tension between purity and pollu-

tion, and the need for cleansing and doing away with pollution are, as I have argued elsewhere,[23] very important to Sinhalese culture, and indeed the burden of much of the present work has been precisely that. What is idiosyncratic here is the presence and importance of the crowds, which turns the purely personal spiritual drama into a public spectacle; and of course, for Ñāṇānanda, into public success which is so much more important. Hence the corpse, the body of sin, must be hidden away.

It is important that we understand, however, that this idiosyncracy is not quite so far from Ratanapāla as might be thought. It is a general characteristic of traditional societies, such as Ceylon's, that people are regarded as most truly themselves with their clothes on. Even acts which we regard as essentially private and personal are conceived in terms of the social role, and no role is more publicly conspicuous, or more meticulously regulated by tradition, than that of a monk. Monks do not eat (*kanavā*), they dine (*valaňdanavā*); they do not sleep (*budiyanavā*), they recline (*sätapenavā*). This granted, however, Ñāṇānanda is particularly rigid in his understanding of this public presentation of his role. He would never allow me to take an informal photograph of him. And the *dhutanga* which he practises is one most publicly impressive: the *ekāsanika dhutanga*, which allows him to eat only once a day, so that he refuses the breakfast brought by laymen in the morning.

In the end, Ñāṇānanda's desire to hold Madunāgala outright was gratified. Though the diary does not record the date of the actual decision, it does record a merit-making ceremony on 7 August 1948 at Madunāgala. This was attended by D. S. Senanayake's son Dudley, who had succeeded his father as Minister of Lands and Agriculture, and by J. R. Jayawardene, Minister of Finance. If their presence reveals that Madunāgala was felt to be of some importance, the absence of the Prime Minister himself reveals that Madunāgala was not paramount.

How could it be? The Kandyan monks still retained much power, and there were others throughout the Low Country who exercised wide influence. The political system was not one

[23] See my 'Hell-fire and Urinal Stones: An Essay on Buddhist Purity and Authority', in *Contributions to South Asian Studies*, Vol. II, ed. Gopal Krishna, Oxford University Press (New Delhi, 1982).

which had been brought under the control of a single powerful king by a combination of historical events and his own character, but was democratic and pluralistic: the British had handed power over peacefully to an elected government representing many interests in the populace. And for that matter the Prime Minister was far more committed to secular government than he was to any renewal of Buddhist nationalism. It was, and and still is, impossible to re-enact the reform of Mahākassapa and Parakkamabāhu I.

The first step in the re-establishment of the forest life was herewith complete: Ñāṇānanda had his hermitage, and his fellows likewise had centres—though none so grandly wild. The next step was to produce a generation of successors, and for this they needed, first, the pupils, and second, an ordination proper to hermitage monks themselves—this latter being necessary, as we have seen, for the preservation of purity within the group. But Ñāṇānanda and his colleagues were still dependent on Kandy for ordinations: the provision that ordinations only be held in Kandy, though a relic of a Kandyan king's attempt to centralize control of the Sangha, still held for most of the Siyam Nikāya. They could not repudiate the Kandyan establishment without casting doubt on their own ordinations; and they recoiled from any action which would upset the Kandyan chief monks. They were left to petition feebly for permission to hold their own ordinations, and the Kandyan monks simply refused.

The consequences of this uncomfortable compromise were felt among the first group of pupils. Ñāṇānanda and his fellows found ten willing candidates—some of them already pupils, and now trained up to the higher ordination. Then, in about 1951 (here I depend only on oral sources), this group of ten was taken to Kandy for ordination. At first the forest-dwellers hoped to have their own monks officiating at the ordination, but even this was refused by the Kandyan monks. Instead of being initiated into the Sangha by a well-disciplined, pure group of ascetics, then, the aspirants were initiated by what they considered a questionable group of property-owning clergy. Their confidence was shattered. Soon only one of the ten remained (this was Ānandasiri, who inspired Tāpasa Himi at Māligātänna), and he soon left to become a *tāpasayā*. There are indications, too, that these young idealists felt that there were

too many other compromises with the village Sangha.

This failure over the ordination is both a symptom and a cause of Ñāṇānanda's later difficulties: a symptom, in that the tie to the village Sangha remained throughout his career; a cause, in that the forest-dwellers, without their own ordination, could not be sure of their purity, their autonomy, or their own internal control. As a result they continued, as they had begun, as a loose colloquy of equals, joining together occasionally for merit-making, or quarrelling, but with no standardization of monastic practice or training.

Nevertheless, Ñāṇānanda's affairs continued to prosper. In 1952 he went to give a sermon in Vaturuvila, his native village, and was accommodated in a stone cave in a large patch of jungle on a nearby hill. The following rainy-season retreat saw a monk from Madunāgala supported in the cave by local laymen—among whom Ñāṇānanda's relatives figured prominently. In 1954 a *kuṭi* was built, and the hermitage then grew quickly, until today it is denominated 'The Vaturuvila Hermitage Centre and Srī Ñāṇānanda Forest-dwelling Seminary' (Vaturuvila Āranya Madhyasthānaya saha Srī Ñāṇānanda Vanavāsa Piriveṇa). It has, among other facilities, space for sixty novices. For Ñāṇānanda this must have vindicated the step he had taken many years before in leaving to cultivate the forest life—it is no accident, I think, that the dream of public self-purification is sited not at Madunāgala but at home, in Vaturuvila. Villagers, on the other hand, are proud to have their own temple and seminary, though none of the ones I spoke to seemed particularly to notice that Vaturuvila is intended for forest monks.

With Vaturuvila, Ñāṇānanda came a step closer to establishing his autonomous group of hermit monks, though he was still unable to confer his own ordinations. He had, by 1973, acted as teacher, either in fact or ceremonially, to 350 monks. He continued to teach meditation, and even wrote a small pamphlet on the subject. He made a great point of establishing cordial relations with the village monks of his area. He seems to have been accorded some pre-eminence by his fellow forest-dwellers, but it is difficult to gauge this, as it was, at the time, quite informal.

In 1966, Ñāṇānanda met Tirāṇagama Ratanasāra, a monk

of the Siyam Nikāya who had just resorted to a hermitage near Hambantoṭa. Ratanasāra became convinced (*pähädunā*) of Ñāṇānanda's virtues, and, through connections made in his days of political involvement, took Ñāṇānanda's case to W. Dahanayaka, Minister of Internal Affairs. Dahanayaka in turn indicated his willingness to register Ñāṇānanda's hermitage monks as a separate *nikāya*, which would effectively forestall any opposition from the Kandyan establishment. (Nothing could express more clearly the final authority of a Buddhist government in religious affairs than this.) Ñāṇānanda would in turn be able to carry out his own ordinations. I do not know the actual course of events, but the Kandyan monks evidently acceded, for in November 1968, Ñāṇānanda was recognized as leader (*nāyaka*) of the forest-dwelling monks in a ceremony at Kandy.

Therefrom flowed many consequences. In the first place, it lent Ñāṇānanda as much authority in his own sphere as a monk can have in Ceylon. As a last resort he could refuse to ordain a monk, or a monk's pupils (though of course they might go back to the Siyam Nikāya in Kandy). He likewise acquired new prestige in the eyes of his fellows. Most important, in the light of his lifelong ambition, it gave him an opportunity to impose some measure of standardization on monastic organization, education and discipline within his sphere. He lost no time over this: in December 1968 he published a list of regulations and topics of study for his seminary. He organized an executive committee (*kāraka sabhāva*) and a year later it published a body of rules (under the title *Vanavāsa Bhikṣu Pratipadāva*). These echo Vinaya rules almost entirely—as do most *katikāvatas*—but there is one significant difference. The rules provide that higher ordinations take place either at Vaturuvila, under Ñāṇānanda's sponsorship, or at Mihindu Āraṇya near Anurādhapura, where Verukē Sumangala presided until his recent death. Sumangala was an early colleague of Ñāṇānanda's, and clearly regarded himself as Ñāṇānanda's equal or better. To cede an ordination centre to Sumangala reveals, perhaps, an admirable spirit of generosity; but also the same lack of harmony to which I have already referred. I think it very likely that Ñāṇānanda could not have ensured Sumangala's co-operation without ceding him the ordination centre. (Sumangala was, significantly, the col-

league of Ñāṇānanda who had also found Çittagutta's cave, in another place altogether.)

It is still too early to tell what the effect of Ñāṇānanda's legitimization will have on his organization as a whole. There were two immediately perceptible results: first, a large building programme was begun at Vaturuvila in 1972, to construct a multi-storey classroom-cum-preaching hall complex. For its rural setting, this will be a very grand building indeed, when and if it is completed. Second, some early colleagues, who had had little contact with Ñāṇānanda for the last twenty-five years, re-established relations with him. This, more than any other single fact, shows the importance of his new status. With the participation of a wider circle of monks, it must have seemed possible to achieve the dream of uniting all the forest-dwellers of Ceylon under one head, after the ideal of Mahākassapa. Unfortunately, this was not to be: Ñāṇānanda sent an emissary to Kaḍavädduvē Jinavaṃsa, who leads a group of hermits rather larger than his own, in order to propose amalgamation. Jinavaṃsa refused. His reasons for doing so will become clear in the next chapter.

The question remains: to what extent is the new *vanavāsi nikāya*—forest-dwelling fraternity—an independent entity at all? On the one hand there is a core of loyal pupils and colleagues around Ñāṇānanda—among his colleagues, Mänikdivela Dēvānanda in particular—who have a strong sense of Ñāṇānanda's consequence, and who realize the importance of their corporate identity. Slightly further away stand colleagues, with their pupils—such as Verukē Sumangala—who established themselves independently in the first place, and whose allegiance to Ñāṇānanda is tempered by a sense of their own importance: yet their ties with Ñāṇānanda are old and enduring. Further away yet stand monks, with their pupils, who have joined Ñāṇānanda only lately, or who have spent much of their lives outside the orbit of the forest-dwellers. These are as close to the village Sangha as they are to the forest-dwellers. Hence, when we look at the membership of the *vanavāsi nikāya*, we must be conscious of its heterogeneity. There are about thirty-five hermitages, with more than two hundred monks, according to Ñāṇānanda's figures. Yet certainly not all of the monks so counted identified themselves as members of the

nikāya in the Ministry of Culture census of forest-dwelling monks; nor did all of the monks whom Ñāṇānanda ascribed to his fraternity so ascribe themselves to me. Part of this discrepancy arises because of inaccuracies in the census, and in Ñāṇānanda's count; but part of it arises because of monks who, in one context or another, co-operate with Ñāṇānanda, but do not identify themselves with him. Furthermore, this heterogeneity extends to monastic practice in the hermitages.

The present looseness of Ñāṇānanda's organization is, to an extent, the result of the absence of a clear leader at the beginning. There is a sense, though, in which we can point to Ñāṇānanda's faulty reading of his model, Mahākassapa's reform. Once he remarked to me that it is very important to keep the Sangha unified. He mentioned this in a conversation about Mahākassapa—who, it will be recalled, presided over a unification of the Sangha—and then went on to speak of his efforts to remain on good terms with neighbouring village monks. (In fact every year on his birthday he holds a grand merit-making ceremony, to which he invites as many village- as forest-dwelling monks.) From this and other conversations, it was clear that he conceived this as an attempt to reconcile—even unify—the two. (As we have seen, this is often desirable in the light of their mutual hostility.) Practically, however, this leads to a number of daily decisions—allowing his own pupils to visit village temples, admitting pupils of village monks to his seminary, sending his pupils to other seminaries—which undermine the principle of exclusive purity on which a reform Sangha is based. There is one sort of purity, however, which is well preserved, and which allows Ñāṇānanda to co-operate as easily as he does with the village monks: caste purity. Though it is not an explicit policy, I know of no example of a monk from another caste being ordained in the *nikāya* in this area. I would hazard the guess that, though the *nikāya* will survive as an entity because of its separate ordination centres, it will not long preserve its character as a reform movement.

One of the difficulties to which Ñāṇānanda's movement was prey was his own reading of his historical precedents. He took them as a collection of images, or tableaux, to be re-enacted. More successful monks took them to exemplify solutions to problems resembling present problems, to be solved by appeal-

ing to underlying principles. But there is one feature in which he has come as close to reproducing the original as is physically possible in the modern age: the pomp and circumstance which must, in his eyes, pertain to a *nāyaka*, a leading monk, like Mahākassapa. Once again, it is not that he is totally idiosyncratic in this, for other hermitages share a general form with Ñāṇānanda's. It is rather that his is starkly drawn, with heavy outlines and an unambiguous message.

For the laymen who arrive to give alms at Vaturuvila, Ñāṇānanda is a holy leader enclosed in a holy precinct. At the bottom of Vaturuvila hill there is a dusty area, where the laymen—often an extended family with friends—park the bus they have hired for the occasion. There too are the segregated bathing wells for their use. As they mount the stairs to the hermitage—they will have arrived in the late afternoon—they come first to a sand courtyard where are located the manager's office and a large preaching hall, with kitchens at the back. Here the laymen spend the night, in order to rise early to prepare food for the next day's alms-giving. A stairway rises up the hillside, but this is marked off by a gate, whereon are posted the hours when laymen may visit the monks above: an hour after noon, and an hour after sunset. This arrangement is common to most hermitages, and is designed to give the monks the peace they need to meditate. It is, furthermore, a symbolic expression of the monks' separation from society, and it is this, combined with the particularly formal etiquette shown the forest monks, which leads me to use the word 'holy'. Among laymen such as this, many of whom do not even know Ñāṇānanda's name, circulates the story of his living on *ghee* in the forest. There are supposedly 365 such lay groups, one for each day of the year: though this does not in fact work out, many groups do return year after year, and also give the manager substantial amounts of money for the hermitage.

About 250 yards up the stone path, past the gate, lies the central precinct of Vaturuvila: a rectangular swept sand courtyard, about 40 by 20 yards, perched on a steep hillside. At one end stands the Bo tree shrine, surrounded by large boulders, while on the uphill side stands the long building which houses a large Buddha image and the chapter house (*uposathāgāra*) for ordinations. At the other end, between a small stone cave

meeting hall and the narrow end of the monks' dining hall, is a small concrete cell, just large enough for a bed and a book-case. This is Ñāṇānanda's room. In the evening he sits on the porch of the cell, chatting with monks, or dealing with correspondence. It is here that I often spoke with him. This is the centre of Vaturuvila: the cells of his colleagues and pupils are dotted on the hillside all around it.

The size of the cell bespeaks the ascetic self-discipline which is such a prominent feature of Ñāṇānanda's life. In this he cannot be faulted. Its central location reflects the paradigmatic and sometimes charismatic role he assumes for his pupils, who are often fiercely loyal. For Ñāṇānanda himself, the quality of life seen from the porch is, in his own word, *madhyasthavat*, which I might translate as 'on an even keel'. In so saying I assume he meant that he was tranquil. Etymologically, however, the word means 'situated in the middle', and suggests his position—and the natural satisfaction stemming from it—seated in the middle of his creation.

Life is not altogether easy for Ñāṇānanda, however. The unfinished state of the classroom building—no small project for a man who does not use money—leads him to lean heavily on his lay supporters, not all of whom give without complaint. Similarly, he told me, while sitting on his porch, that he aspires to have 500 pupils (he had 350 when I spoke to him), which seems to ignore the quality of their education. These are some of the grounds on which he is criticized. Nevertheless these plans, like many others, are viewed by his most loyal supporters precisely as steps toward restoring the forest life to its ancient glory.

Perhaps the most evocatively ambivalent expression of this ambition is found in a small room in an unusual building at Vaturuvila called the *bhāvanāyatana* (roughly, the 'meditation installation'—it is a building for monks learning meditation). On the walls there are six paintings. Four are of legendary scenes of the forest life, such as the monk being eaten by a tiger while his fellows look on helplessly.[24] Two of the paintings, however, are of Ñāṇānanda himself. One shows him sitting tranquilly in his cliff-face cave while bears growl and gnash

[24] He becomes an *arhat* by the time the tiger reaches his heart. From the commentary to the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta*.

their teeth below, and the other shows him unconcernedly sweeping his meditation walkway while a herd of wild elephants files by. Yet it can only have been Ñāṇānanda—by the account of the paintings, a retiring forest monk—who commissioned the paintings for the edification of his pupils.

Of course we have already met other monks who, in one way or another, indulged in what to a European sensibility is self-advertisement. But if character is one's chief business, and if it is in its nature taken to be a matter of public seeming, then achievements concerning character must be public as well. This said, however, it still seems that Ñāṇānanda was more a victim than a reviver of Mahākassapa's legend.

Working Towards Wisdom

CHAPTER 10

Starting a Successful Reform

This final part of the book is devoted to Kaḍavädduvē Jinavaṃsa and his group of forest-dwellers, the Śrī Kalyāṇi Yogāśrama Saṃsthāva—the Eremitical Establishment from Kalyāṇi.[1] Much of what has gone before has been written in the light of an implicit comparison with this group, who are attempting soberly and systematically, with a great deal of intelligence and application, to put the meditative ideal into practice in modern Ceylon. Their common spirit is embodied in a usage which I am nearly certain originates with Jinavaṃsa: whenever they speak of their activities in the hermitage, members of the *saṃsthāva* refer to their 'work' (Sinh. *väḍa*). This may mean any of the duties of their daily schedule, from sitting in meditation, to studying, to sweeping the Bo tree courtyard. (True, I have heard the word so used among other monks, but nowhere with the same fixity of purpose or intensity.) When I visited hermitages in widely separated parts of the island to discuss the *saṃsthāva* and its history with its members, I met strikingly similar treatment: I was received courteously, as at other hermitages, my questions were answered thoroughly, even enthusiastically, but when it came time for the monk to go about his duties, he would say firmly something like, 'I have work to do now' (*dän maṭa väḍa tiyenavā*), and I would have to rise and leave.

The uniformity of this usage throughout the *saṃsthāva* reflects a deeper uniformity of practice among the monks, as well as a store of mutual experience, ideals, and companionship which marks them off as a successful reform group. The members of the *saṃsthāva* have not only spent most of their time with each other, but they have also spent most of that time in serious training. They have put a very large fund of learning, in the Dhamma and Vinaya, into practice, and have managed, so far,

[1] They designate themselves *Kalyāṇi* because they originate within the Rāmañña Nikāya, which traces its lineage to monks such as Puvakdaṇḍāvē Paññānanda, who were ordained at a centre of that name in Lower Burma.

to avoid many of the pitfalls of domestication and shallowly conceived revival. In the present chapter I will recount the life of Jinavaṃsa and the founding of the *saṃsthāva*, and in the process will indicate the decisions and conditions which have made the *saṃsthāva* successful. The next chapter will discuss the revival of meditation, and the third will enquire more closely into the government of the *saṃsthāva*.

Jinavaṃsa was born in 1907 to a Goyigama family in Kaḍavädduva, a village some miles inland from Matara, on the south coast. Of childhood piety there is no record, but he was marked from the beginning as a potential monk: he was bright, he learned languages quickly, and he spoke fluently. Hence, when Jinavaṃsa's father's elder brother, the monk Kaḍavädduvē Suguṇatissa, was in need of someone to help him in his old age, he asked—or perhaps rather *demanded*, for he was a masterful character—that Jinavaṃsa be given to him. There was no contradicting him, so at the age of ten Jinavaṃsa became a temple servant and candidate for ordination, an *äbittayā*, to his uncle, who was in the Rāmañña Nikāya.

These events reveal a good deal about Sinhalese society, monastic society, and the conditions in which Jinavaṃsa's character was moulded, but they will reveal more if we continue the story for a bit. Exercising the same authority, Jinavaṃsa's uncle, for some reason unknown to me—though the act is typical enough—entrusted Jinavaṃsa to a fellow monk in the Rāmañña Nikāya, Kotmalē Saddhammavaṃsa, who lived quite a distance away, near Kalutara. By the time he had been a temple servant there for about two years, Jinavaṃsa had already learned some Pali, almost entirely on his own, and had proven himself to be a promising preacher: when laymen came to the temple, he would stand and preach to them, very much after the style of the monks themselves.

This argues a certain intelligence, but also a self-assertiveness which later turned into a firm independence of judgement. He displayed this turn of character soon enough. Saddhammavaṃsa, like Jinavaṃsa's uncle, was very *särayi*, harsh or strict. Since he was particularly fond of a salad made with a certain sort of leaves (*gotukola sambal*) with his lunch, Jinavaṃsa was ordered to prepare it every day. One day Jinavaṃsa went out to pick the leaves for the salad, but could not find any. He

therefore served Saddhammavaṃsa's lunch without the salad. When questioned, he told Saddhammavaṃsa what had happened, but the monk accused him of laziness, gave him a sound hiding, and went to sleep. Jinavaṃsa, who had had no lunch, was very angry, so he ran away to Kalutara, a distance of about nine miles. After dark, when he was walking toward the station to sleep, he met a drunken farmer who invited him home, offering him supper and a bed. The next day the man told him that he could stay, and he lived there quite happily, tending cattle, for about six months. In the end he was discovered, and he returned home.

In these events, I suggest, we can read both the personal traits and the social conditions which bred Jinavaṃsa into the masterful and inventive character he became in later life. The texture of his life, in this view, was woven of three strands, authority, initiative, and intelligence.

Let me begin with the first, authority. The authority of Jinavaṃsa's uncle was a mingling of the authority of elder over younger in lay society, of monk over layman, and of elder over younger in monastic society. He commanded his younger brother, and his younger brother commanded his son, to go to him as a servant. This is typical of the village Sangha in its relationship to the laity (its kin), is in fact a typical method of recruitment to the village Sangha, and likewise reflects the nature of authority in the Sinhalese family.

To that extent, then, gerontocracy in the family is like gerontocracy in the Sangha. But there are very important differences between the two which would have rendered Jinavaṃsa's experience of his preceptors different from his experience of his parents. Within the family, there is a sexual division of labour, so that the head of the household receives respect and domestic service from his wife, daughters, or female relatives, but respect and service on the farm from his sons. In the monastery, however, both domestic service and respect are due the teacher from his pupil, and of course there is no farm work. At home Jinavaṃsa would have been subject to the authority of many more people, but would have been saved the close supervision of a single elder man; in the monastery, he suffered such supervision, but had a greater amount of unsupervised time to himself.

These circumstances in themselves dictate no particular character, but, combined with the characters already given in both Jinavaṃsa and his preceptors, there is a certain fitness in his later career. His first two preceptors, by Jinavaṃsa's account, were both disciplinarians and men used to wielding command, and these traits were shared by his later teacher as well. Jinavaṃsa himself was to become a notable disciplinarian (at least at the beginning of his career), known and feared among his pupils for a heavy hand. But he was not simply a martinet, however much his training in taking orders prepared him to give them. His intelligence saved him from that, and even enabled him, in later life, to become less strict. And the relative leisure and freedom of the monastery cannot but have reinforced his independence of mind.

But however that may be, his parents were by this time certain that he was meant for the Sangha, and they tried to turn him over to another monk, a scholar, who was however of a lower caste. This monk very properly (by village standards) refused to take him unless permission was received from the uncle, who did not give it. Soon enough the uncle sent a letter, saying that he had found a monk who was sufficiently learned to teach Jinavaṃsa. This was Horana Käkanadura Ariyavilāsāsabha. Jinavaṃsa went to him, and within six months, at the age of fifteen, was ordained a novice. Jinavaṃsa was to stay with Ariyavilāsāsabha until the latter's death twenty years later. Ariyavilāsāsabha was also a member of the Rāmañña Nikāya, which still retained the traditions of learning and of strict asceticism which had been implanted by the founders. Jinavaṃsa could not have had a better education to prepare him to see the difference between village Sangha practice and Sangha ideals.

The traditional nature, and the closeness, of his relationship to his teacher can be illustrated by a dream—in fact the only dream Jinavaṃsa ever had to which he paid much attention, for he is not greatly interested in dreams or the doings of the gods. Once, when Ariyavilāsāsabha was ailing in advanced old age, Jinavaṃsa went to visit another temple, and was prevented from returning home by a flood. He spent the night away from home, and while he slept he dreamt very vividly that his front tooth was pulled out. When he finally got back

home, he found his teacher very ill indeed. The doctor came and an enema was prescribed, which Jinavaṃsa administered himself. This gave Ariyavilāsāsabha some relief, but later, while Jinavaṃsa was talking to him, he passed away. Then, said Jinavaṃsa, he knew what the dream had meant: there is a Sinhalese expression, used of someone very close, that he 'is like my front teeth' (*magē isseraha dat vāgē*).

Until some years after his teacher died in 1942, Jinavaṃsa's career was not particularly extraordinary. During Ariyavilāsāsabha's lifetime, when he was not with his teacher, he was studying at Dharmodaya Piriveṇa in Wellawatte. He received his higher ordination in 1927. In 1932 he went with his teacher to Tebuvana, near Kalutara, to take over a temple whose incumbent was old and infirm, and who had no one to succeed him. Ariyavilāsāsabha turned the temple into a seminary, and Jinavaṃsa acted as chief teacher under him. When Ariyavilāsāsabha died, Jinavaṃsa became the incumbent of the temple and seminary.

During these years there were two particularly revealing incidents. The first was this. The government, which had been becoming more and more sensitive to the wishes of the Buddhists, agreed to offer financial support to approved seminaries. Among the requirements, however, stood a regulation which required that at least one of the teachers at the seminary pass a certain examination (this was, I believe, for the degree of *madhyama paṇḍita*). Jinavaṃsa, in order to gain this support for his seminary, studied for the examination entirely on his own, took it, and passed. Later he educated himself to the highest standard, that of *prācīna paṇḍita*, and passed that as well. I believe that the degree is roughly equivalent to a (perhaps not very strict) university bachelor's degree. His comment on this was typical (from my field notes): 'Mahatmayā [roughly: Mister], I thought I would just try it. Why not? There was nothing to lose. So I studied as hard as I had time for, went into the exam, and took it. And what do you think happened? I passed it! Amazing!'

As he grew older, Jinavaṃsa learned to stamp his intelligence, and his independence of judgement, on his surroundings. As a young monk he was invited to spend the rainy-season retreat with some other monks at a house near Nuwara Eliya. His

chief lay supporter was a merchant (*mudalali*) from the south coast engaged in supplying provisions for the tea estates. This merchant, an especially tough specimen of a tough breed, was in fierce competition with another merchant from the same area, who was not to be trifled with either. When the day came for the final ceremonial almsgiving (*kaṭhina pinkama*) of the season, both merchants appeared at the same time, with family and entourage, to feed the monks. There was only one long table on which the food could be laid out, and both parties tried to appropriate it. The two rivals came face to face, and, as Jinavaṃsa put it, 'it looked as if there would be bloodshed before lunch'. (Field notes.) Jinavaṃsa stepped forward and announced that such dealings were totally unfitting for Buddhists, and that if they continued, he and his fellow monks would go without eating rather than witness such violence. Jinavaṃsa turned to leave, and his fellows, startled, began to do likewise, but the laymen rushed up to stop him, and in the end so far forgot their quarrel that the ceremony was able to proceed smoothly. Not every monk would assert moral pressure so adroitly; nor, indeed, would it occur to every monk to go without his lunch.

Jinavaṃsa lived in obedience to his teacher while the latter was alive but, like others we have met, he was not satisfied. 'I had the *prācīna paṇḍita* degree, I was teaching, I was doing all right, but all the time I felt it wasn't good enough. It was not good enough. We were doing a lot of work, but it seemed to be beside the point, to have no purpose.' (Field notes.) In conversation with his peers, he kept repeating, 'This way of working is not right, not right.' (*Mē väḍa piḷivela hari nǟ.*) It was not until the excitement of national Independence and the imminent Buddha Jayanti, however, that he began to act on his convictions. In keeping with his gifts, he submitted an article to *Siḷumiṇa*, the Sunday newspaper, which was published on 1 May 1949.

The article was entitled '*Täggaṭa Sudusu Vesak Särasilla*'—'The Decoration Suitable for Presentation on Vesak'. Vesak is the full moon day in May on which the birth, enlightenment, and death of the Buddha are celebrated; while the decoration refers to the lanterns and public displays which are erected, particularly in cities, for the festival. It is an occasion in many

ways reminiscent of Christmas, and Jinavaṃsa's homiletic article echoes many Christmas sermons. The point of Vesak lies not in external display, he says, nor in unseemly celebrations, but in the sober observance of virtuous old Sinhalese Buddhist customs. The suitable decorations are not the kind that can be hung in the street, but are internal virtues. He refers to the Buddha's pronouncement on his death-bed (D. II. 137) that the true offering to him consists not of dancing and singing, as the gods did on that occasion, but of following both the great and small prescriptions of the Buddhist path. The article, then, is not unusual in its reinterpretation of ritual and social practices in a spiritual sense—such was the burden of the Buddha's remarks—but it was very timely. It spoke to the then still latent concern of Sinhalese Buddhists for their religion on the eve of a vastly important anniversary; and it spoke with vivid, circumstantial detail. Jinavaṃsa mentions, for example, that temples in the countryside are vacant on Vesak, for the people have all gone to the city to see the docorations. He also touches briefly on an issue which would soon become his central concern: the cultivation by monks of their temple property, and the corresponding neglect of their spiritual state.

The editors of *Dinamiṇa* and *Siḷumiṇa* were impressed by Jinavaṃsa's work, and urged him to continue writing. He produced a second article along the same lines for the 29 May 1949 issue of *Siḷumiṇa*, but in an article published in the same paper on 12 June, he warmed to his real theme: the reform of the Sangha. This article is entitled '*Mahā Sangha Ratnaya Veta Āyācanayak*'—'A Plea to that Great Jewel, the Sangha'—and it is a far more concentrated and arousing piece than either of the preceding two. It is of particular interest because it may well have been a chief source of later excitement over reform and asceticism. Jinavaṃsa addresses himself to all 'Buddhists who love Buddhism'[2] and speaks in the broadest terms of the Sangha as a whole, of the Sinhalese nation, and of the dispensation—he speaks in the terms, that is, that so captured Ñāṇānanda's imagination, and which dominated reform thinking in the period then beginning. The occasion is Poson full moon day, which commemorates the bringing of Buddhism to Lankā.

[2] *Śāsana māmaka bauddhayo*—or perhaps better, 'Buddhists who consider the dispensation their own.'

He writes that, on such an anniversary, 'We wonder which god should be addressed with a request [to assuage] the tremendous pain brought about by seeing the inauspicious condition of Buddhism today.' He does not 'see any god responsible for protecting Buddhism'. Hence, 'since there is no more suitable place, we shall turn to the Sangha, which bears responsibility for Buddhism, in order to express our heart's torment'. Here he has enlisted, I think very successfully, the reader's (putative) common feeling of distress, and turned that emotion of pious hope, usually yoked to the Buddhist gods, to a more earthly and practical object, the Sangha. He continues: 'Long life should be wished to a living object or person. But our first painful thought is, whether Buddhism in Lankā is still alive.' He then goes on to point out that real understanding, that is, penetration and realization (*paṭivedha*) of the teaching, is no longer alive; and that both Buddhist learning (*paryāptiya*) and monastic practice (*pratipattiya*) are in a parlous state.[3]

Jinavaṃsa then turns to history. 'The Lord Buddha did not give responsibility for his teaching to a country which had reached a highly developed state, such as Greece. The Buddha announced as his last desire, "may my teaching be protected by the Sinhalese nation for five thousand years". There is nowhere in the world such an exalted responsibility.' After this appeal to nationalist sentiment, he gives a few detailed examples of monastic asceticism and lay piety in ancient Ceylon, lending them a homely ring.

In contrast to this stirring image of ancient Buddhism, he then deplores present-day monastic practices. Becoming a monk, he writes, is 'for the purpose of witnessing Nirvana, the escape from all suffering' (this is in Pali).[4] I quote, to convey the flavour of his discourse:

A person who becomes a monk renounces even the hair that belongs to the lay estate. What is the point of putting on a yellow robe if you are just going to enter greedily the rat-race [lit. field of strife] for office, gifts and honours, and property? This is like eating what you have just vomited. It is totally unfitting to become a monk 'to escape

[3] Buddhism—that is, the dispensation (*śāsana*)—is conceived as consisting of three parts, each to be cultivated in turn: learning (*paryāptiya*), practice (*pratipattiya*), and penetration (*paṭivedha*). See the next chapter.

[4] 'Sabba dukkha nissaraṇaṃ nibbānaṃ sacchikaraṇātthāya.'

suffering' [in Pali] just to protect an inheritance of position, land, and property, which seems the main purpose of becoming a monk today. Nor is it fitting to wear the robes which [betoken] the victory of arhatship. It seems to me something like this: someone says, '[I become a monk] for the purpose of witnessing pride and leadership, for the purpose of administering temple lands and property, for continuing in suffering' [Pali], and then, instead of providing himself with clothes to wear, provides himself with a purse.[5]

Jinavaṃsa ends the article with a 'humble plea to the Sangha-jewel' to note and announce the present state of affairs, and to promulgate a decree of reform (*katikāvata*) to set it right.

It might seem that, at this point, what Jinavaṃsa was proposing was not entirely distinguishable from the proposals of those others who were calling for reform but whose concerns were more narrowly political or ceremonial.[6] And indeed, as we saw in the last chapter, it is not very easy to differentiate the political heritage of Buddhist nationalism from the religious heritage of Buddhist asceticism. But, though Jinavaṃsa does write of the glory of Buddhist Ceylon and its historical destiny, and though he does mention a national *katikāvata* in the mould of Mahākassapa, his eloquence on behalf of Nirvana marks him clearly. Others, for example, were calling essentially for a return to the feudal privilege and monastic opulence of a much earlier age.[7]

On 7 August he wrote another article outlining the ascetic ideals of the monk's life; and for roughly the next seven years he was to continue writing, preaching, and giving radio talks, chiefly at the invitation of laymen. Certainly Jinavaṃsa's eloquence contributed greatly to the excitement over religion at the time; and it contributed to the success of his own movement as well. As we might expect, he met opposition from entrenched interests: when invited to preach in one village, for example, he had to be protected by police. On another occasion a village

[5] The Pali reads: 'Sabba dukkha saṃsaraṇaṃ ārāmavatthū paveṇipālanātthāya nāyakādi bahumāna sacchikaraṇātthāya.'

[6] The tale of Buddhist politics and political Buddhism at this time is told in Heinz Bechert, *Buddhismus, Staat und Gesellschaft*, Vol. I, Schriften des Instituts für Asienkunde (Hamburg, 1966); and Urmila Phadnis, *Religion and Politics in Sri Lanka*, C. Hurst (London, 1976).

[7] See D. C. Vijayavardhana, *Dharma-Vijaya* (*Triumph of Righteousness*), *or The Revolt in the Temple* (Colombo, 1953).

monk managed to have him barred from a school hall, so he sat under a Bo tree to preach. He did not, however, allow himself to ossify into embittered opposition, as happened to the *tāpasayō* and, to an extent, Ratanapāla. Regarding such events, he was to say, 'Why should I burden my mind with that sort of rubbish? I put it out of my mind.'[8]

By about the beginning of 1950, Jinavaṃsa's articles had been collected into a small booklet which was circulating around the country. This came into the hands of one D. E. Seneviratne, a rich layman who lived near Colombo. He invited Jinavaṃsa to his house on 7 May 1950, and they talked until the small hours. The upshot of this (by Jinavaṃsa's account) exciting conversation was that Seneviratne promised to build a centre for training monks in meditation and the forest life (*yogābhyāsa madhyasthānaya*). Other laymen had already talked to Jinavaṃsa about starting hermitages, but the idea of the *saṃsthāva* itself only crystallized with Seneviratne's offer. The conception developed two notable features: first, the *saṃsthāva* was to train a hundred monks for meditation, and no more; and second, meditation and worship practices were to be standardized at hermitages throughout the island, so that all over Ceylon at the same time of day monks would be found meditating on, say, the noble qualities of the Buddha. With the limitation in size, Jinavaṃsa had already narrowed his hopes from the grand but impractical ideal of total reform to a more manageable project; while with the notion of uniform practice he still retained a vision which encompassed the entire island. And in time he would be shown to tread a middle path between the ambitions of Ñāṇānanda and the strictures of Ratanapāla. The enthusiasm for forms of worship is a special mark of Jinavaṃsa—there seems to be nothing he enjoyed so much as a good all-night ceremony, conducted in the warm circle of his fellow monks—but eventually that would be tempered by the sterner demands of his project.

With this firm commitment from Seneviratne, Jinavaṃsa himself was committed to the idea of the *saṃsthāva*. Nothing could have been sweeter. Earlier he had spoken of being 'half-dead' (*aḍa paṇa gatiya*); now he was fully alive. Despite a persistent disease which sapped his energy for forty years or

[8] Aturugiriyē Śrī Ñāṇavimala, *Vana Pavata*, privately published, 1961, p. 19.

more—I suspect it was amoebic dysentery—he kept up a fierce schedule of writing, preaching, and, now, organizing the *saṃsthāva*. He was able to write the following to a fellow-monk:

Externally our lives are drawn to senescence and death; but internally our life of developing virtue does not age, does not die . . . . Therefore whoever cultivates a life in virtue carries on a victorious struggle moment by moment. When the elders of old, living by the teaching, realized the signs of victory in this struggle, they cried, 'hurrah, happiness!' Though harassed by our natural lives, we are not distressed. Seeing our lives develop in virtue moment by moment, we are joyous, we are consoled.[9]

The first order of business was to provide instruction for the prospective pupils of the training centre: Jinavaṃsa could teach Dhamma, but he was by no means a qualified meditation teacher. Fortunately, however, meditation was still practised among the descendants of Puvakdaṇḍāvē Paññānanda. In particular, there was one monk, Mātara Ñāṇārāma, who had spent much time at Baṭuviṭa, and who had participated in an earlier, unsuccessful, attempt by the Baṭuviṭa–Kirinda monks to revive the forest life. Ñāṇārāma had a *paṇḍita* degree, and was renowned for his intelligence and good conduct. Discouraged by the failure, he had retired to a quiet temple, vowing to cultivate his own meditation. At first he rebuffed Jinavaṃsa's request, but Jinavaṃsa saw that he was not adamant, and so wrote him a letter, and returned to speak to him. This second time Ñāṇārāma acceded, apparently in a spirit complementary to Jinavaṃsa's own. He said, 'I have come to understand that, from birth, I have not had the sort of nature that would shirk this sort of heavy responsibility. My duties to Buddhism are clear . . . . All right, I'll serve together with you in this work for a while.'[10] In fact he was to become, and remain, the chief teacher (*pradhānācārya*) of the *saṃsthāva* for the rest of his life.

The budding *saṃsthāva* now had a teacher, and a training centre in prospect, but neither hermitages nor monks in training. Soon enough, however, Jinavaṃsa's admirers came forward to offer a hermitage. In November 1949, he had been invited by a rich layman to preach in Tissamāhārāma, on the edge of the deep jungle in the south. His sermon so inspired the

[9] Ñāṇavimala, *Vana Pavata*, p. 7.
[10] Ibid., p. 18.

audience that a number of rich laymen in the area formed an association. The association grew, and so did its aspirations. In March 1950, they decided to start a hermitage. On the advice of a hunter, they discovered, a few miles from Tissamāhārāma, the site of an ancient temple which was later identified as Talaṃgara Pabbata Vihāra. This temple, to the immense satisfaction of all concerned, was associated with an ancient saint, Dhammadinna, a noted meditation teacher and miracle worker.[11] The laymen set to work clearing the jungle and building paths. In December 1950, they invited Jinavaṃsa and Ñāṇārāma to come and approve the new site, which they did. The new hermitage was not to be ready for several months, however, so for the nonce that hermitage, called Nimalava, remained in abeyance.

Similarly, Jinavaṃsa was invited to preach in Kurunegala in January 1951, with the consequence that, slowly, a total of seven hermitages were built in that area over the next ten years; but these naturally took some time to build.

Meanwhile Jinavaṃsa's writings continued to bear fruit. The small booklet of his articles came into the hands of Asmaṇḍalē Ratanapāla, who fastened on to it with characteristic ferocity. In the first days of February 1951, he wrote a long letter to Jinavaṃsa, including an exhaustive set of questions concerning Jinavaṃsa's views on ascetic practice.[12] Jinavaṃsa wrote back immediately, agreeing to work together with Ratanapāla, and when they later met, a bond was forged which brought Ratanapāla and his students firmly and whole-heartedly within the ambit of the *saṃsthāva*.

This happened none too soon, for about the beginning of July, with the rainy-season retreat at hand, the laymen at Tissamāhārāma finished three *kuṭis* at Nimalava. They suddenly sent a letter to Jinavaṃsa asking for three monks to spend the season there; he, however, was at a loss, for he had no one to send, and he himself could not afford to spend that time out of

[11] See the relevant entry in G. P. Mālalasekera's *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names*, 2 vols, Pali Text Society (London, 1937; reprinted 1970), p. 1141.

[12] He asked, for example, whether a monk's eyebrows should be shaved along with the rest of his head hair. Following Rāmañña Nikāya practice, Jinavaṃsa stood up for not shaving them, in order to keep sweat out of the eyes. Ratanapāla, following the more ascetic tradition—as well as the tradition of the Siyam Nikāya—insisted that they should be shaved. This did not come between them, however.

touch. Fortunately, on that very day, Ratanapāla and Sumana had abruptly appeared, with no warning, to hand over a pupil for training and ordination. (This was a novice from a low caste whom they had not been able to ordain with the Siyam Nikāya since their break with that group.) Jinavaṃsa turned to Sumana and explained the problem, and Sumana conveyed it to Ratanapāla (who was of course totally deaf). Ratanapāla responded immediately: he had two pupils who were already fully ordained, he said, and they could be sent to Nimalava. Jinavaṃsa himself had a pupil who was fully ordained, and who—I suppose—was willing to work with the *saṃsthāva*, so Jinavaṃsa volunteered him. The only problem was that both Ratanapāla's pupils were lying sick. In Jinavaṃsa's words, from my field notes: 'That was a very close shave, Mahatmayā. On the day those monks came to meet me and my pupil, they got down from the train with medicine bottles in their hands. So off we went, medicine and all, to Nimalava.'

This was, however, the least of the emergencies which faced Jinavaṃsa and Ñāṇārāma. While Nimalava was being built, they had gone ahead with plans to choose and train the meditators who were to be the body of the *saṃsthāva*. The editors of *Siḷumiṇa* and *Dinamiṇa* lent a hand here: in the most modern fashion, they advertised in the newspaper for potential recruits. (I am not sure exactly when this occurred, but I reckon it to have been in the last month or two of 1950 or the first of 1951.) The candidates then wrote to request a form, which they filled out and sent in. Those who seemed suitable were invited to an interview which was to be held in Colombo on 25 March 1951, and ten were to be chosen.

A great deal can be said about the peculiarity of this method of recruitment. It is certainly quite different from the means through which Jinavaṃsa became a monk, and it depends on specifically modern modes of public life, the newspapers. It reveals, too, how much of the revival depended on a certain sort of public debate, and how different it was, therefore, from the reform of Mahākassapa, for example, which had been an affair of the king and a few leading elders. Modernity aside, however, it represented a very firm decision taken by Jinavaṃsa and Ñāṇārāma to choose only those candidates who had a matured vocation for the hermitage life. As a strategy at the

beginning of such a venture it proved to be a conspicuous success.

Then the first disaster struck: Seneviratne, who had been going ahead with the training centre to receive the new monks, was stricken with a stomach complaint. He was ill-advised enough to consult an Indian practitioner who was then the rage in Colombo, and died vomiting blood. His heirs were totally unwilling to continue the work, so the monks were left without a centre. Eventually another layman from Ambalangoḍa on the south coast came forward, and offered to support the novices-to-be at Delduva, a temple of the Baṭuviṭa–Kirinda monks, at least temporarily.[13]

They gratefully accepted that offer, and faced the next obstacle. Every novice, before he is ordained, must spend some time, however short, as a temple servant (*äbittayā*), partially to test his suitability, partially to begin his training. The *saṃsthāva*, however, had no such temples or hermitages: Nimalava and the hermitages near Kurunegala had not yet been built, Mällagala was still in a very primitive state, and Jinavaṃsa was not prepared to have the candidates at his own *piriveṇa*, presumably because he did not approve of its traditional village Sangha methods. The two leaders therefore spent a great deal of energy writing letters and travelling up and down the country to find appropriate temples—those whose practice was sufficiently strict—in which they could place the candidates for a few months. Baṭuviṭa hermitage agreed to take some, while two other temples of the Baṭuviṭa line agreed to take others. Ñāṇārāma, with the agreement of his lay supporters—who, after all, would be feeding the candidates—took the rest at his own temple.

The candidates—in the event, twelve of them—were duly selected and placed in the appropriate temples. They were to be ordained soon, and then trained at Delduva, though a permanent training centre had yet to be found. In early May, Ñāṇārāma and Jinavaṃsa met with the relatively very poor lay supporters at Devagoḍa—Ñāṇārāma's home temple—and they

[13] At least this is how I reconstruct events. Unfortunately I have three separate accounts of these events, and none places them in exact chronological relation to one another. In any case it is clear that the death of Seneviratne created an emergency, and that the other emergencies followed thereupon.

volunteered to build the permanent training centre for the *saṃsthāva* there; only it would take a long time, as they were poor and would have to do it themselves in their spare time.

The monks accepted, only to stumble into the next emergency. The incumbent at Delduva had written to his teacher, an important elder in the Baṭuviṭa–Kirinda line, and had told him that Jinavaṃsa's group were to have their first ordination at Delduva, and were planning to keep their pupils there for a while. The elder wrote back, refusing permission to do so. The monk told the lay supporter, who told Jinavaṃsa; Jinavaṃsa in turn gathered up Ñāṇārāma and the two of them flew to see the elder. That worthy explained that he and his fellows had attempted to start a group of meditating monks with much the same purpose in mind as Jinavaṃsa, but the attempt had floundered within a few months—in fact this had been the reason for Ñāṇārāma's retirement. A long discussion ensued. Jinavaṃsa pointed out two relevant facts: first, his own candidates were, on the whole, much younger than those in the earlier group, and therefore much easier to train; and second, his candidates had already been temple servants for longer than the earlier group, and were still enthusiastic.[14] The elder was impressed by this argument, but not completely: he granted permission to have the ordination ceremony at Delduva, but the new novices could not stay there. On the way home the two leaders decided that they could delay no longer—they could not expect the candidates to retain their enthusiasm, nor could they ask that they be further supported at those temples—so they set the ordination for full moon day in June, less than a month away. At worst—and this was not a pleasing prospect—the prospective solitary meditators would have to be crowded together in the temple at Devagoḍa.

When this came to the ears of the lay supporters at Devagoḍa, they responded magnificently. If the monks would be satisfied with much more humble dwellings of wattle and daub with coconut leaf roofs, they said, then they would try to put something together before the ordination ceremony. The monks

[14] I suspect that Ñāṇārāma and Jinavaṃsa were much more careful in choosing their candidates. I also have reason to believe that the monk who had been in charge of the earlier effort was much too strict, so that the candidates had quarrelled not only among themselves, but with their teacher.

agreed, and they set to work. Through nearly four weeks of steady rainfall the laymen worked, day and night, to clear the area and set up the necessary huts. On 18 June 1951, the ordination was conducted, and the new novices were brought back to their damp new quarters.

With this the *saṃsthāva* had, in embryo, all the components required: teachers, pupils, training centre, hermitages. It was still very shaky, however, and it would be years before Jinavaṃsa could draw an easy breath. The next step was to continue taking pupils—there was already some attrition among the first group—so that process was set in motion again. In December 1951, a second selection was held in Colombo, and eleven prospective monks were chosen. The novice ordination was set for 7 June 1952.

Jinavaṃsa then ran into another obstacle. One of the ideals that he, Ñāṇārāma, and Ratanapāla held very dear was the elimination of caste distinctions—and therefore of distinctions between *nikāyas*—within the Sangha. So Jinavaṃsa invited a distinguished monk of another *nikāya* and caste, Beruvala Sirinivāsa, to act as preceptor (*upādhyāya*) at the ordination of the second batch of novices. The leaders of his own *nikāya*—which has always had a not entirely deserved reputation for being liberal about caste—objected, and he was forced to withdraw the invitations, though Sirinivāsa did give the sermon of advice. For a while to come, the *saṃsthāva* would still be dependent on the resources of the broader Rāmañña Nikāya.

Meanwhile laymen continued to come forward with offers of new hermitages. At Haňdapāngoḍa, on the south coast, laymen met in January 1952 to consider building a new hermitage. Land was donated by a rich layman, and the hermitage was finished and offered to the *saṃsthāva* in August 1952. Then the leaders of the *saṃsthāva* did what, in their still meagre circumstances, must be counted a very brave thing: they left Devagoḍa completely and brought the pupils in training to Haňdapāngoḍa. I will discuss their reasons for doing so in greater depth in a later chapter, but basically the problem was that the laymen had come to expect the hermit monks to participate in village ceremonial life, while the hermits could not do so without compromising their own training. With this incident, which was to be repeated frequently in the history of

the *saṃsthāva*, Jinavaṃsa began to conceive his preaching as an educational enterprise, educating laymen in what they might expect of a reform Sangha.

Shortly thereafter, in September 1952, a meeting was held at Iňduruva, likewise on the south coast, at which monks of the Rāmañña Nikāya encouraged a group of laymen to build another meditation temple for the *saṃsthāva*. This they duly did, and the *saṃsthāva* began training novices there in November 1952, under the leadership of Jinavaṃsa. Another hermitage was offered to the *saṃsthāva* in January 1953 and there another monk from the Baṭuviṭa–Kirinda line joined up: this was Pussällē Dhammatilaka, who took over the new hermitage, Kosgoḍa. With the addition of every trustworthy fully ordained monk, the capacity of the *saṃsthāva* to train novices and to conduct its own affairs increased substantially.

In early 1953, a third group of twelve prospective novices was chosen, and they were ordained in June 1953. They were trained at another temple, whose head monk, Ariyavaṃsa, threw in his lot with the *saṃsthāva*. This was Paragahatoṭa, the so-called 'forest temple' (*kälē pansala*). To this temple were removed most of the novices who needed basic training, for in August of that year the *saṃsthāva* left Haňdapāngoḍa entirely; and in January 1954, they likewise left Iňduruva. In both cases the reason was roughly the same as for leaving Devagoḍa: the demands of lay supporters on the monks' time and attention. Jinavaṃsa took over at Paragahatoṭa, while Ñāṇārāma (I believe) went for a while to one of the new hermitages near Kurunegala.

The most palpable sign of the *saṃsthāva*'s success appeared on 16 July 1953, when fourteen novices received higher ordination with the sponsorship (*upādhyāya koṭa*) of the leader (*mahānāyaka*) of the Rāmañña Nikāya. With this, Jinavaṃsa and Ñāṇārāma had already achieved far more than either the Kirinda–Baṭuviṭa monks, or Ñāṇānanda, whose group of ten novices must have dispersed by about this time. Twenty-six monks took part in the ceremony, among whom were many notable elders of the *nikāya*; and while this did not necessarily imply that the *nikāya* as a whole approved, it did indicate that Jinavaṃsa's work could go on largely unimpeded by his fellows. This ceremony was held near the Delduva temple, however,

and was still to that extent not yet wholly on *saṃsthāva* ground. Less than a year later, in May 1954, the *saṃsthāva* held ordinations to create both new novices and new monks, at Nimalava. Henceforth the *saṃsthāva* would be able to hold its ordinations on its own ground. The third higher ordination ceremony, held at Nimalava in July 1955, was performed only by monks closely associated with the *saṃsthāva*. This was a sign of its growing independence from the rest of the Rāmañña Nikāya, an aspiration which had to be fulfilled before it could have confidence in its own purity as a reform Sangha.

After five years—that is, by 1956, the year of the two thousand five hundredth anniversary celebrations—Jinavaṃsa considered that he could stop to breathe. There were nearly fifty fully ordained monks; and several more hermitages, among them a number spawned by Mällagala, which had been added to the list. Monks continued to join from outside, but now they had to have a *daḷhi kamma*—a reconfirmation of their higher ordination—and possibly a *sanghādisesa* purification, before they could be accepted. The *saṃsthāva* met at Nimalava to compose its own *katikāvata*—not a national one, of course, but one governing the hermitages of the *saṃsthāva*—and a very self-confident one it turned out to be. There were now two training centres. The first, founded at Puhulvälla near Matara, was offered by a layman named Heṭṭigē, who spent his life savings on it. The success of this seems to have been the fruit of a particularly trusting relationship with the monks. Similarly, the centre at Galdūva was founded only after a firm and clear understanding had been built up between Jinavaṃsa and the Senanayake family, the chief supporters there. (And people, be it noted, of a different caste than Jinavaṃsa.) Jinavaṃsa had learned that he could afford to be—indeed, was compelled to be—careful to make the needs of the *saṃsthāva* understood.

The tenth anniversary in 1961 saw the *saṃsthāva* fully constituted, with slightly more than a hundred monks and forty hermitages or centres. It expanded only very slowly beyond this. As it stands, it is an elect group which enjoys more internal cohesion as an order than any of the circumambient village Saṅgha. In a later chapter I will discuss its composition more thoroughly. Here I will discuss in more detail the conditions which led to its success.

In the background of this and all other movements of the period lay, of course, the Buddha Jayanti, that great event which allowed the *saṃsthāva* to attain autonomy in the brief span of five years. It was, as I have noted, a *public* event: a great welter of opinions were thrown before the public, who responded in a variety of ways. On the one hand, the election of 1956 was the only election of Ceylon's short history as an independent democratic nation in which religion played a significant part. On the other hand, an orgy of spending on religious causes supported not only the sober *saṃsthāva*, but also the building of Buddha images on street corners, to rival the Catholics' roadside plaster saints.

Also important, apart from the sheer quantity of resources turned up through the media, was their geographical extent. Jinavaṃsa could recruit from every part of Buddhist Ceylon, and he could find lay supporters everywhere. Simultaneously in Kurunegala, in Tissamāhārāma, and on the south-west coast—places as far apart in Buddhist Ceylon as they could possibly be—groups of laymen came forward to offer their money and time. And in turn the successful use of this communication network depended on Jinavaṃsa's extraordinary ability to lay his case in writing, over Radio Ceylon, and in person. In an earlier age, I am tempted to believe, only direct access to royal patronage could have achieved a similar effect, and that only provisionally.

For the *saṃsthāva*, however, success meant not only, nor even chiefly, material success, but the revival of a way of life, and in that they depended very heavily on the cultural and spiritual resources of the Rāmañña Nikāya. It was not perhaps a very vigorous force for religious change at the time, but these monks, particularly in the south, preserved among themselves the spirit, and a good deal of the practical learning, of Paññānanda and Ambagahavattē. Jinavaṃsa could trust his own instincts, he could trust Ñāṇārāma, and the newly-ordained monks could trust in the purity of their ordination. The contrast, of course, is Ratanapāla's experience with the Siyam Nikāya: for him revival was a far more difficult and uncertain affair, depending on the discovery, out of total obscurity, of rules and procedures which, for the Rāmañña Nikāya, simply had to be taken down from the shelf and dusted. Here we can see the

significance of continuity in the Sangha's tradition in a very concrete way.

But most of its success lies with the *saṃsthāva*, and its re-creation of a tradition which consists not merely in the sum of its parts—a shared knowledge of a wide body of texts, a shared ordination tradition, and a unanimously recognized authority structure—but also in a shared disposition, a common spirit. Perhaps the best way to describe this spirit is as a generally accepted attitude toward the solving of problems as they arise in daily monastic life. I shall write of this at length in the following chapters, but here let it suffice to say that this spirit is composed of two complementary, though not always entirely harmonious, principles of intelligence. The one is represented, very roughly, by Ñāṇārama. It consists of a careful, methodical, remorseless, and confident effort to establish the original significance for action of the canonical texts and commentaries, without shrinking from any of the consequences. This led to his own original decision to retire into obscurity, and also played some part in the decisions by both founders to abandon this or that monastery at very crucial points in the *saṃsthāva*'s development. And since it is a principle of intelligence, and recognizable as such, it was possible for Jinavaṃsa and Ñāṇārāma to select their colleagues, and their colleagues them, by its light. For indeed there were monks who wished to join but were not allowed to. Those who did join possessed a clear and articulate aspiration to the ideals of Buddhist asceticism, and the capacity to realize them in large part.

The second principle is represented in the character of Jinavaṃsa, and consists in a creative intelligence which is able to infuse imaginatively the prescriptions for forest life with a vividness which brings them alive for colleagues, pupils, and laymen alike. Jinavaṃsa is not a genius of asceticism: he is content to live in a relatively quiet but comfortable centre, Galdūva, surrounded by pupils, going occasionally to a monks' retreat in the cool mountain resort of Bandarawela for the sake of his never very robust health. His gift is rather to make the forest life seem a series not of prohibitions, but of opportunities for liberation, and to penetrate the cant of certain superficially plausible ideas to expose their inevitable consequences. This quality he shares with other monks of the *saṃsthāva*, but none

has it in such generous measure. Jinavaṃsa, far from being a passive bearer, or a victim, of his tradition, forged it into a light and wieldy tool. He is human; not all his strokes are accurate; but so eloquent and thoughtful are they that those who receive his letters keep them and use them to teach their own pupils.

CHAPTER 11

Meditation

There is a large sign posted outside Jinavaṃsa's training centre at Galdūva which explains the purpose of the *saṃsthāva*. It begins with these portentous words: 'Buddhism still leads to Nirvana (*apa sambuddha śāsana tāvama nairyānikayi*).' And it goes on to explain that the *saṃsthāva* is wholly devoted to training its monks for liberation. But in fact the revival of a method of training to that end, essentially the re-establishment of a meditation tradition, was no less difficult and unpredictable a matter than the establishment of the *saṃsthāva* itself. This part of the revival was left in the hands of Ñāṇārāma, who published the results of his research and experimentation in 1961 in a booklet called *Vidarśanā Parapura* ('Tradition of Insight'). In this chapter I will first discuss Buddhist meditation in general, and then follow the argument of Ñāṇārāma's booklet. At the end of the chapter I will describe a monk's actual experience of meditation.

The assertion of the sign at Galdūva is in part a defiant reply to a large body of opinion, current in the 1950s in Ceylon and represented most vocally by Subodhānanda's group, which held that it is no longer possible to attain Nirvana in the present age. This argument was based on a Buddhist cosmological text[1] which asserts that man's moral and intellectual capabilities, as well as his lifespan, decay through successive ages. Hence, it was argued, man has so far declined since the Buddha's time that he no longer has the mental capacity to attain Nirvana. And this argument, which makes of the gap between the present and the Buddha's time an unbridgeable abyss, was bolstered by another: received tradition of Sinhalese origin holds that the last *arhat*, the last monk to have attained liberation, was one Maliyadeva Thera, who is attributed to various periods by various traditions, but who is universally held to have died a long time ago.[2] Therefore, since he was the last

[1] *Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Sutta*, D. III. p. 26.

[2] See references to him in E. W. Adikaram, *Early History of Buddhism in Ceylon,*

arhat, there can be no more. It is significant, of course, that this view was defended by that group of reformers who did the least to present themselves as seriously attempting to revive the meditative life.

But the sign also defies a more serious and potentially paralysing doubt felt in scholarly quarters. The Buddhist monk-scholar Polvattē Buddhadatta, writing some time in the 1950s, said, 'We receive no help from history or written sources to show that a meditation tradition came [to us] unbroken'.[3] The German scholar Heinz Bechert goes further, and states simply that the meditation tradition was 'completely broken off'.[4] If this is so—and I will suggest that it is very nearly true—how was it possible to recover what was lost, revive what was dead? How could something so subtle as a meditation tradition be reliably restored from desiccated texts, from the mere letter which must once have contained a lively spirit?

The detailed answer to this lies in the extended description of the process of revival which comprises this chapter. A short answer, however, is this: in Buddhism, just as there is no initiation (*dīkṣa*) into an esoteric tradition, there is no esoteric tradition. The Buddha held nothing from his pupils in the 'close-fistedness of the teacher' (*ācariyamuṭṭhi*; D. II. 100). He taught everything which he wished to teach, and everything was remembered by his pupils, passed from mouth to mouth, and eventually written down. Just as religious experiences are not especially validating (though to have a great deal of experience —in quite a different sense—is validating), so there is no special sort of meditation experience vouchsafed by a teacher. Monks may be obscurantist, yes, but the Sangha conceals nothing from itself on principle. Hence, I suggest, any dogged sceptic of the validity of present-day meditation traditions must really question the validity of the Sangha's written tradition, and must therefore doubt whether the *Visuddhimagga* is genuine, or even whether the canonical materials themselves can have truly represented the Buddha's views. One would have to take, in short, an extreme view of the ineffability of the spoken word and of

M. D. Gunasena and Co. (Colombo, 1946). He is still a figure in the folklore, especially in the Kurunegala District.

[3] See below, p. 232.

[4] Bechert, *Buddhismus, Staat und Gesellschaft*, Vol. I, p. 50.

the uniqueness of experience; or of historical relativity. I do not do so.

The word for meditation in Pali and Sinhalese is *bhāvanā*, whose meaning might best be glossed as 'cultivation' or 'self-training'.[5] As such it does *not* mean—I cannot emphasize this too strongly—merely sitting in solitude and engaging in some special form of internal contemplation, although that is the image which the word, like the English 'meditation', calls up in the mind of the average Sinhalese. (It is suggested by the sitting Buddha image found in almost every temple.) *Bhāvanā* is the perpetual concern of the monk, and ideally covers his attitude—investigating, reflecting, learning—toward his every deed. In this light Jinavaṃsa always hoped some day to write a book about the Vinaya rules which he would call *Hita Hädima* ('Training the Mind'): it would show that each rule, in so far as it governs some aspect of the monk's behaviour, and in so far as every aspect of the monk's behaviour is governed by some rule, has a purpose in mental cultivation. *Bhāvanā* is, in other words, more active than our idea of meditation, and indeed in Sinhalese one 'nourishes', 'develops', or 'increases' it, *vaḍanava*. It is in this sense that the *saṃsthāva* monks speak of their 'work', *väḍa*, and it does not escape them that this is etymologically related to the word for 'develop'. In this respect, therefore, the entirety of the Buddha's teaching is conceived as directions for meditation.

But of course *bhāvanā* is also used in the sense of sitting in meditation. This is called 'doing *bhāvanā*' (*bhāvanā karanavā*). This is the meditation which is specifically described in the second and third divisions of the *Visuddhimagga*, on concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*). These describe a very highly developed psychic technology, and the division between the two corresponds to a significant division in meditation techniques. The first encompasses the meditations for tranquillity (*samatha*), and Buddhists conceive that these are held in common with

[5] The best books available on this in the West are Nyanaponika Thera, *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*, Rider and Co. (London, 1962); and the section in Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, Gordon Fraser (Bedford, 1967). Also very useful is Vajirañāṇa Mahāthera, *Buddhist Meditation in Theory and Practice*, M. D. Gunasena and Co. (Colombo, 1962).

other Indian traditions. The second is comprised of the technique for understanding the true nature of one's psychophysical constitution, and of the world, and is peculiar to Buddhism alone. This is *vipassanā*, insight, meditation.

I will begin with the *samatha* or tranquillity meditations. These in fact include a great variety of topics with a great variety of purposes. Some have the purpose of inculcating some particular attitude or rectifying some fault in character. The meditation on the qualities of the Buddha (*Buddhānussati*), for example, inculcates confidence in the Buddha's teaching. The meditation on death (*maraṇānussati*), which invites the monk to reflect on the unpredictability of mortality and his own fragility, inspires the monk to greater application. The meditation on *mettā*, loving-kindness, cures the monk with an angry disposition and creates an amiable relationship with his environment. Many of these meditations require no great expertise, and are in fact widely practised in a rudimentary form as recited texts.

Nevertheless—this is a point I will amplify as we proceed—the fact that the meditation is contained in a text, which gives explicit directions as to how it is to be practised, in no way contradicts the purpose of the meditation, which is *to cultivate an attitude, not to learn a doctrine*. These meditations, then, are not far from the cultivation of *sīla*, moral purity, which likewise aims at a transformation of character.

But these meditations also conduce to a particular mental skill, that of concentration or 'one-pointedness' (*ekaggatā*). And among the *samatha* meditations are another class of topics which are designed precisely to that end and no other:[6] the *kasiṇa* meditations. These, in their practice, are relatively simple, for they involve concentrating on one thing, such as the colour blue, and excluding everything else from the mind. The greatest part of their exposition in the *Visuddhimagga* is therefore devoted, not to how to do it, but to its consequences. The meditator goes through different stages, *jhāna*s, and these represent a sort of hypertrophy of meditative technology, for they really

[6] This is not strictly true. In fact some of the *kasiṇa* meditations are meant to lead to supernatural powers as well. But these powers have no part in the serious cultivation of the Buddhist path, and are recognized as a sidetrack and not a very fruitful one at that.

just depict the growth of concentration and unshakeable equanimity at the expense of emotions, including the pleasurable emotions associated with meditative attainment. With these meditations a teacher is advisable, because the rigid exclusion of everything else from the mind may amplify or even create pathological strains of character. (To this extent it bears out the Freudian proposition that repression gives rise to pathology.)

The most convenient way to summarize the *samatha* meditations, of which there are traditionally forty, is that they are preparatory to the real work on the Buddhist path. They inculcate certain desirable character traits, and they teach the fundamental skill, concentration. These character traits, combined with that skill, enable the monk to tackle the relatively more difficult but more important task, *vipassanā* meditation, insight, the training that leads to liberation.

To practise insight meditation is to see—or perhaps better, to *discover*—the psychological realities described in Buddhist doctrine in one's own experience. There are many divergent and sometimes not very distinguishable methods for going about this, but they all may be subsumed generally under the following procedures.

First, the meditator must be able to concentrate on some circumscribed element of his immediate bodily or mental experience, and in this the calm and concentration cultivated earlier are vital. He may, for example, concentrate on his breathing, a process which is relatively automatic yet easily perceived. Or he may concentrate on his body in movement as he walks back and forth on a meditation walkway. He may also keep track of feelings of pain or pleasure as they arise; or, slightly more difficult, he may attempt to continually analyse his general cast of mind, whether it is happy or unhappy, agitated or calm, etc. This is, as it were, the raw data, the laboratory material, the experimental basis upon which he builds his understanding. It is this immediate empirical referent which allows the Buddhist teaching to claim for itself that it is *sandiṭṭhika*, immediately perceivable.

But, of course, there are a large number of things which one might see by so concentrating. What one is specifically invited to dwell on is the *tilakkhana*, the three most relevant signs which

characterize this internal experience in the stream of consciousness.

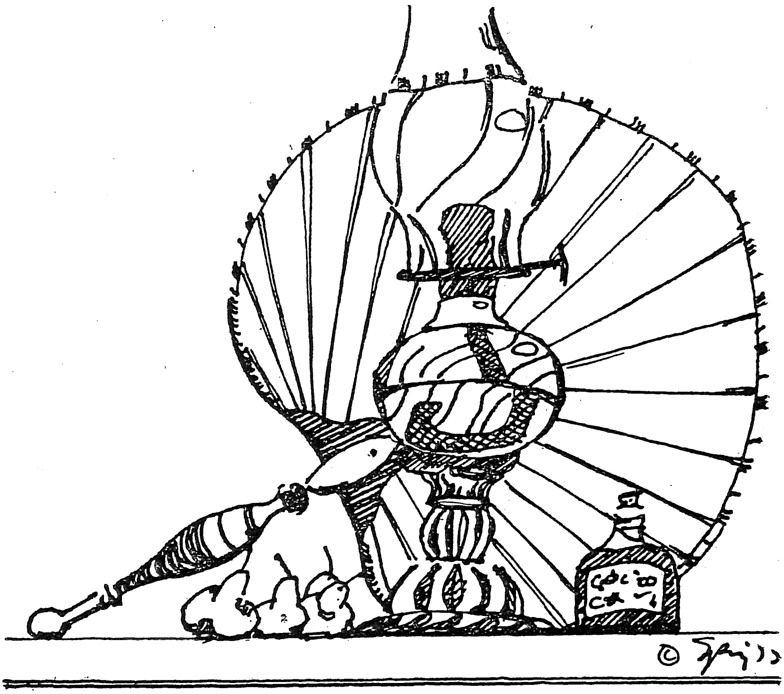
The first is that of impermanence, *aniccatā*. It will be observable that the objects of cognition in this stream of consciousness rise and fall, come and go.

But, as I pointed out in the introduction, this continual process of change is not neutral: it is accompanied, indeed motivated, by continual movements of preference and rejection, liking and disliking; by, in other words, desire, and no sooner is one perception or gratification achieved or frustrated than another desire arises. This is the sign of *dukkha*, unsatisfactoriness or suffering.

Furthermore, this stream of changing unsatisfactoriness is *anattā*, devoid of any compellingly important essence or self. This is the third sign. One consequence of this is that the stream, unlike what is conventionally considered 'mine' or 'me', is fundamentally uncontrollable. The body ages, perceptions and thoughts come and go, and even the strenuous efforts of a meditator can hold this flow in check only provisionally, temporarily.

And in place of the enduring self or soul, the meditator is invited to contemplate the conditioned and composite nature of internal experience. That is, he is to recognize that the psychophysical events which he investigates are *caused*, by that process of desire which gives rise to *dukkha*; and that they are *composite*, being the product of mentality and materiality (*nāma-rūpa*; mental events interdependent with bodily events). Indeed, there are a number of doctrinal analyses of the process of psychophysical becoming which creates that chimera, that burden, the self, but their implication is all the same: there is in fact no self at all, only a collection of discriminable constituents (*khandhā*). This is not entirely a matter for alarm, for the very absence of a permanent self leaves the way open to realizing the situation, rejecting it, and thereby achieving liberation.

This is precisely what the meditator does. Once he is settled in the realization that experience and its objects are inherently impermanent, unsatisfactory, and devoid of any compellingly real essence, he is able to renounce them. He is able, in other words, to give up desire, to discriminate between the dangerous habits and attitudes which lead to grasping, and the newly-



In a cave. At night the monks' caves are lit by kerosene.
A monk's fan, his ink bottle, and some rose apples.

achieved habit of relinquishment. And with relinquishment comes release, Nirvana.

Thus the method, in very crude outline, of insight and wisdom. It presupposes a taste for asceticism and psychic purity, and it is constituted upon a single-minded commitment to further deepening that taste. The meditator arrives at a state of detachment in which the pleasures or indeed common experiences in the world do not touch him. For him this is a happiness (*sukha*) beside which the more common joys of the world are torment. The training, that is, is both intellectual and emotional.

This last observation, in fact, holds the key to understanding a problem which puzzles many for whom the categories of Buddhist doctrine—the three signs, the discriminable constituents, and so forth—are not immediately transparent. What

precisely is the relationship between the meditator's experience, the raw material, and these categories? What is the connection between the discursive propositions of doctrine and psychological reality?

The best answer, I think, is this. The meditator in fact trains himself to see his psychophysical world of experience in terms of the categories. But, just as the meditation on loving-kindness is directed at an attitude, and the *kasiṇa* meditations at a skill, so here both an attitude and a skill are learned: the attitude of finely-tuned renunciation, and the skill of discriminating among one's most intimate and minute impulses. The best analogy might be the perception of a trained artist, whose seeing is direct, immediate, unfiltered by discursive categories, yet highly cultivated and structured. His consciousness is an artefact, yet a supple and wieldy artefact. And likewise the meditator: the propositions of doctrine are transmuted into immediate perception, here and now (*diṭṭh' eva dhamme*), and with his disciplined and wieldy mind he is able to effect a change in his most intimate mental habits (having already disciplined himself physically by the Vinaya).

For Buddhists, of course, the answer is much simpler. Just as the Buddha *discovered* the teaching by strenuous introspection, so the meditator *rediscovers* it in himself. Nevertheless, as we shall see presently, the problem of connecting the doctrinal categories with immediate experience was the chief obstacle facing Ñāṇārāma in his revival of the meditation tradition.

Ñāṇārāma's booklet, *Tradition of Insight*, is explicitly a history of Buddhist meditation, and implicitly a record of his search for a reliable construction of meditation to be taught to the pupils now in his care.

He begins by referring to the Buddha's heritage as it is traditionally conceived in Ceylon, as the *śāsana*. And, traditionally, he explains the *śāsana* as being divided into the threefold categories, learning, practice, and penetration. Learning, *pariyatti*, he describes as 'the immaculate collection of advice . . . which provides the path to Nirvana'.[7] It consists of the canon,

[7] Ñāṇārāma, *Vidarśanā Parapura*, p. 2 *et seq.* As Nyanatiloka points out in his *Buddhist Dictionary*, this is a commentarial list.

the commentaries ('which . . . show the easy way to understand . . . profound passages'), and the subcommentaries. Learning is the first step. 'The Buddha's word,' he writes, 'should be learned with a pure, faithful mind.' Of course, the assumption that what has been received in a written form is as good as the Buddha's spoken word, and that the commentaries and subcommentaries are a reliable guide to the original, underlies this injunction. It is a matter of faith, one might say, but a faith firmly bolstered by the sheer volume and circumstantiality of the scriptures.

From learning one goes on to practice, *paṭipatti*, which is 'the fulfilment of learning', and is divided into *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*. It is, in other words, the actual undertaking of the path of self-discipline and meditation. 'Thereby occurs the control of defilements in body, word and mind, defilements which have led [one] astray under their influence . . . since beginningless time.' It is the defilements, that is, which fuel the endlessly changing stream of unsatisfactoriness. And the successful accomplishment of this practice is realization, or perhaps better, penetration, *paṭivedha*. This is enlightenment.

These, then, are the terms in which Ñāṇārāma conceives his problem. He writes, as did Jinavaṃsa in his newspaper articles, that however confident the monks are of their learning, the dispensation is not complete unless there is also practice and penetration. This is, of course, a rather backward and ponderous way of putting it, for the purpose of *paṭipatti* and *paṭivedha* is not the fulfilment of the *śāsana*, the Church, but the release of the individual monk. As we shall see shortly, however, he still has his eye firmly on the main task, the re-creation of a living meditation tradition.

Ñāṇārāma then devotes himself to the origin of the meditation tradition.[8] He locates the beginning in the training of the first five converts to Buddhism, the *pañcavaggiyabhikkhū*. He refers to a passage in the commentary to the *Majjhima Nikāya*[9] which depicts these monks meditating, and the Buddha advising them on how to cleanse their meditation topics (*kammaṭṭhāna*) of impurities—in other words, giving them personal advice on their meditation. This advice was the fountain from which all later advice was to flow. He writes: 'Because this group, and

[8] Ñāṇārāma, *Vidarśanā Parapura*, pp. 3–7.

[9] *Papañcasādanī*, Vol. II, p. 192.

groups that appeared later, had first-hand experience, ease in [meditation] has been provided to later generations.' He is addressing himself, that is, to the most practical and detailed aspects of meditation. And it was handed down from generation to generation: 'Thus those monks and laymen understood [meditation] by various methods, taught [it] to each other, and so this tradition of meditation advice, sprouting gradually, accomplished its work.' In other words, what Ñāṇārāma seeks (to avoid his metaphor and stick to our own) is a pool of practical experience, the work of many minds over a long period of time.

As he points out, this advice was first passed on from teacher to pupil by word of mouth. But, he writes, 'It is clear from the nature of the dispensation that, to the extent that there is no religious life, no being a Buddhist, without meditation advice, Buddhism is thus bound to the evanescent.'[10]

This remark prefaces Ñāṇārāma's discussion of a vitally important step taken in Buddhist history, the writing down of the canon some time in the first century B.C. And here he does show a keen recognition of the problems inherent in a written tradition. For he agrees with Walpola Rahula in considering this a not entirely wholesome development.[11] They associate it, first, with the rise of scholasticism, a concern for learning as an end in itself. This in turn involves a lack of interest in meditation, indeed a certain distaste for it. And in fact the development of academic scholarship was intimately related to the development of the village Sangha. Ñāṇārāma puts it like this: 'Because, as time went on, the Buddhist way of doing things became heavily dispersed into worldly work, advice on meditation, as well as the monastic way of life, was for the most part fixed in books.'[12]

This process of ossification was gradual and complex. It involved a division of labour within the Sangha, the growth of different interests and views, and, in the commentaries, a hardening of opinion, a congealing of insight into clear and unalterable lineaments. We can only surmise a beginning, but an advanced stage is recorded in the *Visuddhimagga* of the fifth century A.D. Indeed, some colleagues of Ñāṇārāma have suggested that the elaboration of the *kasiṇa* meditations belong to

[10] Ñāṇārāma, op. cit., p. 7.
[11] *History of Buddhism in Ceylon*, pp. 157–61.
[12] Ñāṇārāma, op. cit., p. 7.

this period, as a sort of hypertrophy of technology. And certainly it is to the commentaries that we owe the special word for a meditation topic, *kammaṭṭhāna*, and the formal division of these into thirty-two, or thirty-eight, or forty particular meditations.

These developments, argues Ñāṇārāma, had a further serious consequence, namely that the heritage of meditation advice, now written in books, was entrusted to special teachers. This change is well illustrated by a change in the meaning of the term for such specialists, *kalyāṇa mitta*. In early canonical texts it had signified simply 'wise companion', the sort of serious and experienced fellow-seeker any monk would be well advised to cultivate. But in the *Visuddhimagga* it means 'specialized meditation teacher'. And Ñāṇārāma further infers that such specialists became scarce, preferring to live in seclusion. To support this view he quotes a list from the commentaries[13] which describes the occasions on which a meditation teacher might be approached by an aspirant: as, for example, when he is going begging, when he is putting on his robe, when he is brushing his teeth, etc. . . .

All this led Ñāṇārāma to conclude that meditation methods had indeed been written down in books, and that these were the chief, if not the only, indigenous source of inspiration for meditation. He quotes from a letter written by the great scholar-monk Polvattē Buddhadatta: 'We receive no help from history or written sources to show that a meditation tradition came [to us] unbroken.' The chief reason for this break in the tradition was the nearly four centuries of internal dissension and external colonization that preceded the founding of the Siyam Nikāya in 1753. Meditation flourished briefly under monks from Thailand then, but their methods, like the older ones, were written down in books which were then forgotten by the village monks. His first task, therefore, was to marshal those written methods available to him.

Of the many texts he mentions—by no means all of which have survived—the chief, of course, is the *Visuddhimagga*. Its significance is so well attested and widely accepted that he devotes only a brief mention to it. Of the others, three were particularly significant. One was the *Yogāvacara Sangaha*, trans-

[13] I have been unable to trace this.

lated into English as *The Manual of a Mystic*.[14] Though this had received a good deal of notice, Ñāṇārāma lets Polvattē Buddhadatta's comment stand: 'It is not a method of meditation.'[15] This method arrived from Thailand in the eighteenth century, and its author(s) succumbed to the fascination of the meditative absorptions (*jhāna*), which are so extensively treated with the *kasiṇa* meditations. I suspect that here we have an example of an imaginative but not very insightful attempt to revive meditation from the texts, for the texts seem to have been treated as repositories of magical lore.[16]

Another was the method descended from one Väligamuva monk, brought to the *saṃsthāva* by one of the earliest elders to join it. Ñāṇārāma characterizes it as a method 'to a great extent complete', by which he means that the advice on insight meditation is relatively clear but rather too sketchy.

Finally he mentions a tradition he calls the *amṛtākara varṇanāva*—the 'explanation which makes for immortality'. This likewise descended from Thai monks of the eighteenth century, and was preserved in Kandy by the Bambaragala line of monks. It had three books attached to it, one of which, the insight meditation book, was edited and published in Sinhalese by the Colombo scholar-monk Päravähära Vajirañāṇa. It gave a fairly circumstantial account of meditation, and went into some detail about mindfulness of breathing. Ñāṇārāma found this very useful, if not conclusive. And indeed one may say generally of these texts that they can be quite effectively compared and corrected by referring to the canon and commentaries.

Ñāṇārāma had, therefore, very extensive written materials with which to revive the meditative tradition. But he also had the thread, however slender, however tenuous, of a living tradition. After mentioning the four centuries of darkness, the revival by the Thai monks, and the subsequent loss of their tradition by the Siyam Nikāya in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, he refers to the Rāmañña Nikāya, his own predecessors.

[14] F. L. Woodward, Pali Text Society (London, 1916).

[15] Ñāṇārāma, op. cit., p. 31.

[16] There is a Thai book on meditation which does much the same for the analytic categories so important to the *Visuddhimagga*. This is what happens when the sense of such categories is lost. See *Sammā-Samādhi*, presented by T. Magness (Bangkok, n.d.).

He alludes to Paññānanda and to a number of Paññānanda's colleagues and pupils. This group, he writes, 'did the work of the *śāsana*, cultivating insight meditation'.[17] Not only did they have contact with the traditions from Thailand, but several of them had been to Burma, and may well have brought experience from there.

What happened to this tradition? The only explicit evidence given by Ñāṇārāma is this remark: 'At the time when this method of working was ready to go under . . . insight meditation work began to develop again.'[18] The method about to go under was Paññānanda's, and Ñāṇārāma was its heir, though he very properly does not mention himself. The new development, of course, is the *saṃsthāva*.

However, on evidence that will shortly be presented, I infer that a key part of this meditation tradition, if it was ever complete, had been lost by the time it came to Ñānārāma. What he did inherit was the notion of meditation as a daily practice, its place in an orderly daily schedule, the importance of Vinaya and indeed of the *dhutangas*. He also inherited the notion that those lists of analytic categories so prominent in the *Visuddhimagga* are very relevant to meditation. What had been lost was their connection with immediate psycho-physiological experience. Meditation had become discursive contemplation of dogma, with no clear understanding of its use in training the intelligence to investigate the here and now.

One sort of evidence for this can be sought in Ñāṇārāma's line of pupillary succession,[19] which began with Paññānanda.

Paññānanda's chief—perhaps only—pupil who carried on his meditative life was Raṃsāgoḍa Sumana. Sumana's career was very much in the style of the nineteenth-century revival, for, like Paññānanda himself, he began it with the Siyam Nikāya—in fact he had his higher ordination—and then decided to give that up to go to the forest with Paññānanda. He was reordained in the Rāmañña Nikāya, and from about 1867 until Paññānanda's death in 1885 he was his teacher's chief companion. In

[17] Ñāṇārāma, op. cit., p. 23. [18] Ibid.

[19] This is drawn from a collection of biographical sketches written for the cremation ceremonies of the monks in the line. They were kindly lent to me by the Venerable Candakitti of Valapola Pirivena, Panadura, who moreover was very helpful in discussing this history with me. The conclusions, however, should not be associated with his name.

his own time he became a living legend in the surrounding countryside on account of his stern asceticism and strictly reclusive way of life.[20] His biographer states that he valued meditation more than his own life, and that he commanded his fellows and students to act the same. 'To visitors, whether monks or laymen, he would say a few significant words and then dismiss them.' His daily schedule, which is enshrined in the *katikāvata* of Baṭuviṭa and Kirinda, follows a pattern found in the commentaries:[21] he would rise before dawn, meditate, then worship at the Buddha image. He then returned to his *kuṭi* to meditate—perhaps by walking back and forth—until it was time to go begging. After begging, and offering flowers and food before the Buddha image again, he would spend the afternoon in meditation, until the evening worship. After evening worship, he would preach or advise his pupils, and would then return to his *kuṭi*, where he would dismiss his students for the night and continue meditating. It is no wonder that, as the writer of his chief pupil's obituary said, 'Those devotees who know the situation do not believe that he was without the noble path and its fruits' (that is, a state approaching Nirvana).

Sumana lived until 1929. His chief pupil was Kōḍāgoḍa Upasena, who was a very different character indeed. As a youth he too was inspired by Paññānanda, and, when his parents refused to allow him to become a monk at the hermitage, he stopped eating. They relented, and he went to Paññānanda, who turned him over to Sumana. As he had the makings of a brilliant scholar, he was carefully educated by Sumana and another famous forest monk of the nineteenth-century revival, Ilukvattē Medhaṃkara. He duly became a monk—when his parents did not respond to the suggestion that he be ordained, Sumana and Medhaṃkara went to them and 'advised' them—and was sent to Colombo to learn Sanskrit. When Medhaṃkara died he took over that monk's up-country seminary, and later settled in his own seminary at Panadura, south of Colombo. He wrote a great number of books and smaller articles, and was famed as far as Cambodia for his scholarship.

[20] The story is told of him that he did not emerge from the forest until after bicycles had become common in Ceylon. When he first saw one, he said, 'Amazing! How can a man run so fast with that iron between his legs?'

[21] See, for example, the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta Vaṇṇanā*.

His biographer makes a great point of saying that he was a true pupil of his teachers, and that he valued the tradition of insight very highly. This is clearly the case, but he does not seem to have had much taste for the ascetic life. He sent his own pupils to Baṭuviṭa or Kirinda, and would often go there—or, notably, to a nearby village temple—in order to teach them, or to wait on Sumana. He was very active in fostering the hermitages, but there is no evidence that he himself taught meditation as such; instead he taught Dhamma, which, as we have seen, is vital to meditation, but does not constitute the sort of practical advice necessary to meditators. He was also a great scholar of Vinaya, and an exemplary monk himself, and so contributed, if from a distance, to the strictness of the Kirinda line. He did not, however, carry on the line of meditation as such. I suggest, therefore, that he contributed in a sense to Ñāṇārāma's dilemma: it is one thing to be very familiar with the sources on Buddhist philosophy and the higher levels of the path, but quite another to know how to practise it, and to teach pupils to practise it.

Upasena died in the 1940s.[22] He had many pupils, some of whom associated closely with Sumana, and who subsequently took over Baṭuviṭa and Kirinda, and founded other hermitages and village temples. Among them were several who were honoured in their obituaries as *vidarśanācāryayō*—teachers of insight (meditation), a title not lightly bestowed by posterity. One of them, Harumalgoḍa Sīlālaṃkāra, shared the ascetic life with Sumana, and in fact seems to have practised the *dhutangas* with a vengeance. He also practised insight meditation, and it may be significant that this is described by his biographer as 'beginning with attention to the eighteen elements' (*aṣṭādaśa dhātu manasikāra mukhayen*). The eighteen elements are one of the ways of dividing experience in order to see its composite, and therefore basically insubstantial, nature. They appear at the beginning of the section on *paññā* in the *Visuddhimagga* as one of the lists to be learned before undertaking insight meditation. If I am correct in assuming that the line of meditation advice began to take on a purely dogmatic—rather than experiential—character, this is a manifestation of that tendency.

[22] Unfortunately I do not know the exact date.

It was one of Sīlālaṃkāra's brother-monks, Mavullē Vanaratana, who was Ñāṇārāma's teacher. Vanaratana, already a fully ordained monk, went to Kirinda in 1907 to live with Sumana. He took part whole-heartedly in the ascetic life, and seems by all accounts to have been likewise a great believer in strict Vinaya purity. At his instigation (with the help of Upasena) the Baṭuviṭa–Kirinda monks began to hold their higher ordination ceremonies apart from the rest of the Rāmañña Nikāya; and it was also he who tried, in the 1940s, to start a new generation of hermitage monks. (This was the unsuccessful attempt which disillusioned Ñāṇārāma.) His biographer does not, however, speak of him as a teacher of insight meditation, although he certainly meditated himself, and taught meditation to Ñāṇārāma at Baṭuviṭa in the 1930s.

Two things are remarkable in this history. First, the monks of this line had a strong tendency to emphasize asceticism, which was in fact a trait of the founder himself. But this carries with it the possibility of asceticism being treated as a sufficient end in itself, which might therefore replace the cultivation of wisdom—which is, after all, in many ways more difficult. Nor can the small size and obscurity of this group have fostered a very active intellectual climate in which to pursue wisdom.

Second, the method of transmission itself may have been faulty. It is characteristic of education within the Sangha that everything is first learned by rote, that is, memorized and repeated to the teacher. And indeed the analytic categories are just the sort of thing which are created by, and lend themselves to, this method of teaching. Furthermore, the relationship of very junior monks to their seniors, in this line but also in others I have observed, is often a very distant one, unless the senior takes a strong initiative in teaching. When Vanaratana first went to Kirinda, Sumana was probably near seventy, a legendary and therefore awesome figure, and it is quite possible that he never quite got the point across to Vanaratana. And indeed, if one really 'begins with attention to the eighteen elements', one may never get past learning them by heart. The point may very easily be obscured behind a mass of scholastic detail, never to emerge.

But however the thread was lost, it is clear that Ñāṇārāma was eager to find it again. This he achieved when, in 1958, he

went to a hermitage set on a coconut estate at Danavukanda, where he practised meditation with a teacher from Burma, U Javana. In reference to the practice he undertook there, he wrote: 'Just as the knowledge gained in insight meditation is deep, so is the line of advice in insight meditation very deep. By carrying out the method of work proper to a meditator, it is possible to accomplish the job. But because of the [possibility of] going astray in such internal matters, this may lead to an undesired result [confusion, that is, or even madness]. Therefore the person undertaking such meditation must start to work without confusion and with a devotion to the method.'[23] Here he attests to his confidence that he has tapped a rich source of practical advice about meditation.

The Burmese meditation tradition taught by U Javana enjoins the meditator not to begin with analytic categories—though it does not eschew them—but with his breathing. He begins by concentrating on the rising and falling of his abdomen, and on the sensation which appears there. Through this he learns to establish effortless concentration on the sensation. The practice extends to all activities, in fact. If he is walking, for example, he concentrates on walking. This aspect of the practice established the concentration necessary, as well as the skill of contemplating one's own most intimate experience with calm detachment.

Furthermore, the arising of potentially distracting thoughts or perceptions—sounds heard, for example, or random thoughts—are integrated into the practice. The meditator is to attend to the process of such a distraction, its beginning and cessation, and then return calmly to his primary meditation topic, his breath. This extends the habit of detached contemplation to the entire psychophysical entity, and fosters the vision of impermanence.

Once established in this practice—which may be a matter of days or years—the meditator is in a position to apply the analytic categories. He may see his experiences, for example, simply as composite, made up of body and mental states, or he may dwell on impermanence. Or he may use one of the other analytic category sets. As he continues, he learns to subsume all his experience under these headings, and is well on the

[23] From his Preface.

way towards thorough detachment. The method has been worked out so thoroughly by Burmese meditators that it is now taught to laymen as well as monks in Burma, Thailand, Ceylon, and India; and recently it has begun to be taught in the West.

Ñāṇārāma assimilated this to his previous training, which took the analytic categories for granted. He writes: 'The main idea of insight meditation is to understand, as it is, the composite nature of our experience (*saṃskāra dharmayangē yathā tattvaya*). The method is to begin by providing an understanding by dividing the elements of experience (*dharmayan*) into body and consciousness (*nāma-rūpa*). An aid to this is purification by self-discipline and by concentration. One concentrates the mind on the belly, [experiencing that] the body [is perceived] by the contact of air. When beginning meditation, one contemplates everything manifested to the senses [including the mind], without exception, in the present.'[24] Here the significance of the method for Ñāṇārāma lies precisely in the words 'manifested to the senses in the present'. This concrete approach to insight meditation was precisely the missing piece of a puzzle that was otherwise complete.

Ñāṇārāma goes on to point out in greater detail the problems that had faced him. He writes that some vital pieces of information had in fact been left out of the *Visuddhimagga*, and he instances the following: when practising the *samatha* meditations in order to develop strong, unbroken concentration, it is necessary to rigorously exclude all sense perceptions and thoughts but that of the meditation object; yet this is never pointed out by the *Visuddhimagga*. By the same token, when practising insight meditation it is necessary to accept, and analyse, *all* sense perceptions and thoughts; but this too is left unmentioned. This is clear enough in retrospect, however; and in any case the basic steps—following the breath, and attending to the body, feelings, and thoughts—appear in the canon with relatively circumstantial descriptions.[25]

In his contact with the Burmese monk, then, Ñāṇārāma tapped a source of meditative experience which, added to that already available to him in a less assimilable form from his

[24] Ñāṇārāma, op. cit., p. 24.

[25] In the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, and the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* of the *Majjhima*.

written sources, gave him the necessary confidence. Significantly, however, texts played a great part in the development of the Burmese meditation tradition itself. Nyanaponika records the history of the method briefly. It began with the search, by one U Narada, a Burmese monk at the beginning of this century, for 'a system of meditation offering direct access to the Highest Goal'.

In the course of his quest . . . he met a monk who was reputed to have entered upon those lofty Paths of Sanctitude [*ariya-magga*] where the final achievement of Liberation is assured. When the Venerable U Narada put his question to him, he was asked in return: 'Why are you searching outside of the Master's word? Has not the Only Way, Satipaṭṭhāna, been proclaimed by Him?'

U Narada took up this indication. Studying again the text and its traditional exposition, reflecting deeply on it, and entering energetically upon its practice, he finally came to understand its salient features. The results achieved in his own practice convinced him that he had found what he was searching for: a clear-cut and effective method of training the mind for highest realization.[26]

Heinz Bechert[27] speculates that Anagārika Dharmapāla had been the first Buddhist to revive meditation from texts. I doubt that U Narada or the unnamed teacher had any contact with Dharmapāla, and I think this is but another illustration that, for Theravāda Buddhists, the texts form a source of inspiration and a repository of experience; desiccated, it is true, but ready to be reconstituted by intelligence and personal application. I suggest, too, that the very unreliability of other meditation traditions, such as the *Manual of a Mystic*, may imply that they were revived from texts, but unsuccessfully.

I should in fairness add that the Burmese method was not accepted by everyone in Ceylon. The monks of Vajirārāma temple in Colombo, for example, were strongly opposed to it. This was partially due to its being taught to laymen, sometimes in large numbers, at the height of enthusiasm in the mid-1950s. As Ñāṇārāma observed, it is a skill which, if not properly learned, may be confusing rather than enlightening. At the basic stages this is likely to be because the meditator, in trying to follow his breath, either hyperventilates or passes out from

[26] Nyanaponika Thera, *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*, p. 86.

[27] *Buddhismus, Staat, und Gesellschaft*, Vol. I, p. 50.

not breathing enough. Word of some unfortunate experiences among laymen reached Vajirārāma, with the consequence that the Burmese method was characterized by at least one of the monks there as 'a *miccha-diṭṭhi* [deluded] tantric belly meditation'. Here 'tantric' suggests, to a Sinhalese Buddhist, sexual licence parading as spiritual practice; and indeed it seems to have been mostly women learning to meditate who swooned.

There were more substantive objections, however. The first was that the breath is to be perceived not at the belly, but at the tip of the nose, presumably following the line of the meditation book found by Päraväհära Vajirañāṇa. This is not a serious objection, for the purpose in any case is to discover a place on the body—whether nose or belly—where the breath can be clearly apprehended.

The second, more serious, objection was that, according to some sources, the meditator needs to attain to one of the states of unbroken concentration (*jhāna*) before he can begin to practise insight meditation. Over this a controversy raged in the pages of the *World Buddhist* magazine, between a Vajirārāma monk and a Burmese monk, for many issues in the period 1957–9. There is in any case commentarial precedent for both pure insight meditation (the Burmese method; *suddha vipassanāyāna*) and insight meditation based on unbroken concentration (*samathayāna*).[28]

Ñāṇārāma for his part was so persuaded by the Burmese method that he adapted it for his own teaching. Other monks of the *saṃsthāva* learned it as well, and it is now well assimilated into the meditation technology of the *saṃsthāva*. For a while (but no longer) pupils were sent to Kanduboda, a meditation centre some miles from Colombo, in order to learn the method from Sinhalese monks who had Burmese connections.

It would be false, however, to lend it too much importance. This is illustrated best, I think, in Jinavaṃsa's reaction to it. From my field notes:

People had come to Jinavaṃsa to ask whether he thought the method was all right. [This is in the light of the controversy.] He answered that he could not say, because he did not know it, but he would go and find out. He went to Danavukanda to study with U Javana. For eleven

[28] See, for example, the commentary to the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta*.

days he practised intensely: up early in the morning, all day long until late at night he watched his breath. He worked at it very hard. He went to the teacher, but the teacher said he did not have it yet, so he went back to work. He tried and tried, but got nowhere. He got upset. He went back to the teacher, who told him that some people tried to calm themselves so much that they ended up with no [perceptible] breath to follow. Others strove so hard that they ended by breathing very hard indeed. Jinavaṃsa said he was breathing very hard. The teacher said that was wrong, that he should let the breathing go on of its own accord and just watch it. He went back and tried to let it just happen. After some hours, he found himself sitting, watching the breath. He told the teacher. The teacher said, that's right, that's it. So he came back and said that the Burmese method was fine.

Jinavaṃsa's discussion of the method sounds a casual note which betrays, not that he is indifferent to it, but rather, that he sees it as only one part of a much more extensive training in *paññā*. Meditation is *bhāvanā*, or total cultivation, and in that perspective the skill taught by the Burmese method is only one part of a much greater arsenal of techniques.

The question remains: to what extent are Jinavaṃsa and Ñāṇārāma successful in setting their pupils on the road to Nirvana? Jinavaṃsa put it this way (from my field notes): 'It is as if the Buddha had found the road and cut the underbrush back long ago. Now the path is overgrown again. We don't know which way to go. So if some of us cut the path a little way, those who follow after can go further and further until perhaps the road will be open and many will reach the goal.'

There is in fact some evidence of their success in this. In 1973 rumours spread in Colombo that a monk who had attained to the status of *sotāpanna* was coming from Mitirigala, where Ñāṇārāma teaches, to give a sermon in Colombo. The status of *sotāpanna*—'stream-enterer'—is ascribed to one who has entered the stream to enlightenment, and is destined to certain enlightenment in a few more births.[29] These are very much a matter of legend to Sinhalese Buddhists—the commentarial

[29] There are four 'noble persons'—*ariyapuggala*—, types for describing those who approach closely, or achieve, Nirvana. These are *sotāpanna*—stream-enterer; once-returner—*sakadāgami*; non-returner—*anāgami*; and *arhat*. These refer to the number of births within which the monk will attain Nirvana. The non-returner is reborn in a heaven, and achieves Nirvana from there. See Nyanatiloka's *Buddhist Dictionary* under *ariya-puggala* for descriptions and references.

tales of ancient Ceylon are full of them—and the idea that one might actually exist was very exciting. Middle-class housewives rushed around to gather soap and towels to offer to the monk; children were scrubbed and forced into their best clothes to visit the wonder.

As far as I can gather, the truth of it is this: the rumour spread when a layman at Mitirigala overheard a conversation between Ñāṇārāma and the monk, in which Ñāṇārāma certified that, by his lights, the monk must have actually attained the state. Jinavaṃsa said that Ñāṇārāma had told him it was true. The qualifications for the state are as follows. First, the monk must overcome the belief that there is a real person in experience beyond the constituent parts described by the analytic categories (*sakkāyadiṭṭhi*); second, he must have overcome all sceptical doubt (*vicikicchā*) about the truth and practicability of the path to enlightenment; and third, he must have given up belief in the efficacy of mere rites and rituals (*sīlabbata-parāmāsa*). In this last especially it is clear that, to the extent that it is actually achieved, it represents an assimilation of the path at a level far more intimate than mere excitement and wonder at a legendary ideal. Here we have a glimpse into the atmosphere of Ñāṇārāma's hermitage, where the details of the Buddhist path are a workaday reality, neither distant nor particularly glorious.

I turn now to illustrate the teaching and practice of meditation as it is actually carried out in the *saṃsthāva*. I obtained this circumstantial account of a monk's life in meditation in one remarkable interview. I could not have got the information—monks are prohibited by Vinaya from claiming higher attainments, and are therefore properly reluctant to discuss such matters in personal detail—had Jinavaṃsa not been present. He gave the monk permission to speak to me freely.

The monk himself, whom I will call Guṇānanda, was, so far as I could judge, about average in ability for the *saṃsthāva*. He had wished to become a *tāpasayā*—he was drawn to asceticism—in about 1948, after inspecting the claims of other religions: Christianity, Hinduism, Islam. He went from temple to temple, listening to sermons and taking the precepts. He finally dis-

covered a real ascetic in the monk Sīlarakkhita, one of the handful of truly secluded and obscure monks I found who had been living the forest life oblivious of trends of reform and decay. (Sīlarakkhita was persuaded to join Jinavaṃsa in about 1951.) He began as a novice with Sīlarakkhita in 1949, at the age of twenty-two. From my field notes:

Guṇānanda started doing meditation in 1950. His first *kammaṭṭhāna* was the qualities of the Buddha. [This is commonly the first meditation.] After he had done that for some time he started directly on insight meditation, namely, impermanence, *anicca*. The meditation was simply to look upon everything as impermanent. [This is a glimpse of how insight meditation might be practised without the streamlined Burmese method, which of course was not then available.] Then he went on to *dukkha*. After some considerable time at this Guṇānanda got sick of everything. He didn't want anything. He didn't want to eat, he didn't want to see or hear anything. He saw that there was great *dukkha* in everything. At the height of this he was afraid to go to sleep lest he die in his sleep. He became very sick and confused. He went to do meditation but found he had no subject to meditate on. He talked to another monk, who told him that it was pointless to go on when he couldn't see the path, so he should stop. He stopped. [Here he clearly lacked detailed instruction. Later he was able to negotiate a similar experience successfully.]

Then, still as a novice, he went to study at Devagoda with the first batch of *saṃsthāva* pupils. He took up *piḷikul bhāvanā* [that is, seeing the body as made up of constituent parts—hair, skin, etc.—and as disgusting; this is to wean the monk of attachment to the body]. This he developed to the point where he could see himself, and everyone, as a pile of filth—*kunu goḍak*. This too reached a point where he could go no further, so he stopped.

Then he took up *ānāpānasati* [mindfulness of breathing]. He did that for a while, but he began to take big breaths, great gulping breaths. His body quivered and shook. He had great racking pains. He went to Ñāṇārāma, who told him to stop it, so he stopped.

Then he took up the cultivation of loving-kindness. This is a subject which largely agreed with him. He developed great comfort, so that he could sit for hours at a time. He developed *pīti* [joy] and *vitakka-vicāra* [discursive and applied thinking], etc. [These are the characteristics of the first *jhāna*, the first of the higher attainments in *samatha* meditation.] I suggested gingerly that this sounded like the first *jhāna*. He said that he did not know if it was or not, but that Ñāṇārāma said it was.

Then a remarkable experience. He was sitting in his *kuṭi* back at Sīlarakkhita's hermitage—he must have been fully ordained by now—meditating on loving-kindness. He sat down at about 8 p.m. By 11 p.m. he was still sitting. Suddenly he heard a great noise and felt the roof caving in. He jumped up, but found that all was perfectly quiet. He went outside. Nothing. He came back in and tried to go back to sitting. He sat, but his muscles started cramping and tightening in waves from his feet up to his head, over and over again. He went outside and walked around. Came back. Tried to sleep. Couldn't. Went for a long walk in the forest, until dawn. Still could not sleep. He did not sleep for three days, and even then not for very long. It was a month before he was able to relax again. [Experiences of this kind are not uncommon. I might suggest, too, that the atmosphere at Sīlarakkhita's hermitage does not seem to have agreed with Guṇānanda. Sīlarakkhita is a fierce ascetic.]

In 1958—this last experience was in about 1956—he went to Danavukanda to see the Burmese monk, and stayed for several weeks to follow his meditation system. While he was there, he had many experiences. Then he fell ill—not due to meditation—and had to quit. Then he went back to meditation on loving-kindness.

About 1964 or '65 he went to Kanduboda [where the Burmese method is taught] and stayed for about a month. There, again, he had many experiences. In particular he began viewing his internal processes as if they were laid out in front of him. This went very well for a while, but then various obstacles to practice appeared: headaches, visions, the like. It was at that time that he began to see everything going, going, falling apart, decaying, and *para lova biya* rose in him [the fear that arises while practising insight meditation when the meditator begins to see the evanescence of all his experiences]. He was told to just sit it out, which he did. [Here he successfully negotiated an experience like that which stymied him when he first practised insight meditation.]

Finally, I asked Guṇānanda whether he had had any visions of gods or the like. He said he had. Once while he was sitting a beautiful personage, gold-coloured and dressed in silk garments like the traditional depictions of the gods, walked toward him and held out a tray of flowers for him to take. When he reached up to take it, though, the personage vanished. He said that such visions are nothing, and may even be obstacles to practice.

Though this is only a sketchy description of the pleasures and difficulties of meditation, I take it, from the accounts of other monks, to be typical. Visions do occur to meditators—some see many, some none—but they are usually treated as distractions.

His experience of feeling the roof caving in, for example, was spoken of by another monk as the result of over-exertion; and indeed the piece of advice Guṇānanda was first given when he went astray meditating on suffering stands for all meditators: when the path is not clear, stop. The system of meditations, in other words, provides such a wide variety of different trainings, and the trainings are so applicable in one way or another, that no monk is confined to a single method.

It is difficult to construe a shape to Guṇānanda's life from this superficial witness, and we are in no position to adhere to any unambiguous standard from which such a matter might be judged. Certainly he seems by external criteria to have developed satisfactorily. He is now a trusted teacher in the *saṃsthāva*, with his own pupils, and he has prepared the *saṃsthāva*'s booklet of Vinaya acts. Internally his attainment of the first *jhāna* with the meditation on loving-kindness, and his experiences with the Burmese insight method, imply that he took them quite far.

What can be inferred from his experience is the growth of expertise within the *saṃsthāva*. He was much more successful with the Burmese method than he was with his first attempt in insight meditation. He is in constant contact with his colleagues, and the teaching and practice of meditation is one of their main topics of conversation. The *saṃsthāva*, in short, is now a community of meditators constantly improving and refining their techniques and understanding. They share a pool of experience. In the next chapter I will discuss the establishment of an atmosphere conducive to this exchange.

CHAPTER 12

Organizing for Self-Cultivation

Erich Frauwallner has argued, to my mind convincingly, that sometime, not very long after the death of the Buddha, members of the Sangha composed a long epic cycle of his life from historical materials lying to hand.[1] This cycle has not been passed on as a piece, but one very large part of it, containing the last instructions of the Buddha to his monks, is found in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, D. XVI. Here are promulgated the principles and purposes of the Sangha, principles which are elaborated elsewhere in the canon, but which are nowhere else so pithily and cogently stated. This chapter, in discussing the organization of the *saṃsthāva*, will examine the significance of these principles, their mutual coherence or contradiction in practice, and the problems met in applying them in contemporary Ceylon.

The first of all first principles, the basic orientation which, because of its position in Buddhist thought and social organization, embodies the uniqueness of Buddhism among the world religions, is stated in this much-quoted advice of the Buddha from the discourse: 'Each of you should be an island unto yourself, you should make yourself, and no other, your refuge; you should make the Dhamma your island, the Dhamma and nothing else your refuge.' (D. XVI. 2. 26.) This, to Buddhists, is a stirring and conclusive statement of the nature of spiritual action in Buddhism, and it is the measure of the not merely material success which I have attributed to the *saṃsthāva* that they are more or less able to keep their eyes fixed on it. In this view the Sangha fulfils its purpose with Guṇānanda meditating alone in his cave, and in no other way.

But, as I have already pointed out, there are certain further implications which accompany this radical emphasis on self-reliance. One is an explicitly anti-authoritarian view. The exhortation to 'be islands unto yourselves' is the peroration of the

[1] Erich Frauwallner, *The Earliest Vinaya and the Beginnings of Buddhist Literature*, Vol. VIII, Serie Orientale Roma (Rome, 1956).

Buddha's reply to a request, made by the faithful disciple Ānanda, for some final instructions to the Sangha. The Buddha begins that speech thus: 'What does the Sangha expect of me? . . . Surely, Ānanda, it would be someone who thought "I will take charge of the Sangha", or "the Sangha depends on me", who would make such an announcement. The Buddha, Ānanda, does not think "I will take charge of the Sangha" or "the Sangha depends on me".' (D. XVI. 2. 26.) But this is not a recommendation for anarchy, as is made clear elsewhere in the discourse, where the Buddha says: 'There might be those among you who would think [when I die], "the word of the Teacher has come to an end, we no longer have a teacher". But you should not regard it thus, Ānanda. The Dhamma and the Vinaya which I have explained and laid down will be your teacher when I die.' (D. XVI. 6.1.)

Authority, that is, must vest in thought, not in person, to preserve the vital exercise of one's own faculties toward the goal of liberation. And the consequences of this twin principle, the primacy of self-reliance and of the Buddha's pristine teaching, can be read throughout Buddhist history. On the one hand, the institutionalization of self-reliance through the Vinaya meant that only late, and then only provisionally, did there appear anything like a church hierarchy. On the other, there was an early and persistent concern with the preservation of texts and the rules of evidence for the validity of a text, and therewith a pervasive scholasticism (whose efforts to preserve sometimes threaten to smother). That robust self-confidence, combined with a deep and easy mastery of the scriptures, which we met in Jinavaṃsa, are likewise evidences of this principle. Where Christian monks cultivate obedience, Buddhist monks cultivate independent (if orthodox) judgement.

In practice, however, the principle of self-reliance comprises not so much a rule of organization as a restraint thereon, so that besides these elementary principles are given secondary ones, to facilitate the co-operation of a group of people. In the discourse, immediately after asserting that the Sangha's teacher should be the corpus of his teachings, the Buddha proposes the form of this practical principle: 'In so far, Ānanda, as the monks now address each other as "comrade", you are not to do so after my

death. Elder monks are to address the younger by name, or family, or as "comrade", and younger monks are to address their elders as "sir" or "elder".' (D. XVI. 6. 2.) This of course is the principle of deference to age and experience which I have already mentioned. The consequence is that there are, with the provisional and late exceptions, no offices as such in the Sangha, but rather relationships: authority is exercised in much the same way that it is exercised in an extended family, or in a gerontocratic society. This obviously does not allow for control of a group larger than the pupils of one teacher, and the subsequent Buddhist history of schism, conflict, decay, and reform might be regarded as the effect of this limitation. On the other hand, by systematically avoiding the logical next step in the 'routinization of charisma', namely, the institution of offices and a hierarchy in the organization, the Sangha allowed for the preservation, or revival, of its original emphasis on self-cultivation.

Nevertheless there is, inevitably, a tension between the gerontocratic principle and the prescription of individual autonomy. This is ironed out in many ways, both at the level of values and of specific Vinaya injunctions. At the level of Vinaya, a newly ordained monk, for example, is to live in dependence (*nissaya*) on a teacher who is responsible for training him . . . but only until he is sufficiently well-trained to carry on himself. And it is remarkable that the very passage which describes the considerable personal services owed a preceptor (*upajjhāya*; MV I. 25.) also provides that the pupil correct his teacher if necessary, or even give him exhortatory talks. Nothing could be further from the spirit of absolute obedience prescribed in the Desert Fathers.

Furthermore, the autonomy of each individual monk is provided for in the rules governing the conduct of communal meetings, and the procedures for ratification of important acts. However limited and, in later days, purely formal the provisions, they did offer an opportunity for any member of the Sangha to have his say.

And indeed the discourse expresses these various principles and values very clearly, in a speech in which the Buddha explains what the Sangha must do in order to prosper in their

purpose. These are the 'things which make for non-decay' (*aparihāniya dhammā*), of which the first four are particularly relevant here. (D. XVI. 1. 6.)

1. The first advises that the monks meet in 'full and frequent assemblies' (*abhiṇhaṃ sannipātā sannipāta-bahulā*).

2. The second prescribes that the monks 'meet in concord, rise in concord, and do the business of the Sangha in concord' (*samaggā sannipatissanti samaggā vuṭṭhahissanti samaggā saṃgha-karaṇīyāni karissanti*).

3. The third provides that the monks 'not proclaim [as rules] what has not been proclaimed, not violate what has been proclaimed, and conduct themselves according to the rules of training as proclaimed' (*appaññattaṃ na paññāpessanti, paññattaṃ na samucchindissanti, yathā-paññattesu sikkhā-padesu samādāya vattissanti*).

4. The fourth states that the monks should 'honour, esteem, give hospitality and obeisance to those monks who are elder, experienced, long-ordained, who are fathers and leaders of the Sangha'; and that the monks should 'form their opinions according to what they hear from such elders' (*ye te bhikkhū therā rataññū cira-pabbajitā saṃgha-pitaro saṃgha-parināyakā te sakkarissanti garukarissanti mānessanti pūjessanti tesañ ca sotabbaṃ mannissanti*).

It seems very likely that this legislative and administrative form was taken from the practice of the oligarchic republics of the time, such as the Sakyas, among whom the Buddha was born. Indeed, in the discourse the 'things which make for non-decay' for the Sangha are accompanied by a similar list applied to the Vajji republic, neighbours to the Sakyas. As a coherent form of self-government it can be summarized thus. The policy of the Sangha has been settled for all times in the teaching of the Buddha and in the rules laid down by him, and these rules are organized around the Sangha's chief purpose, self-cultivation. The interpretation and administration of this policy are in the hands of the elders, who are conceived to be both experienced and wise. And the ratification of certain key decisions is to be referred to the Sangha as a whole—or rather, to the sangha—a body who are frequently consulted and who preserve their unanimity through constant and harmonious contact. It is this last principle, constant and harmonious con-

tact, which allows the two centrifugal tendencies, a demand for personal autonomy and the need for an authority structure of some kind, to be drawn together and made to work.

These, then, are the principles upon which that first Sangha constitution to which I alluded in an earlier chapter is founded. Yet, if we step closer and look at the practical implications of the principles, it will be clear that, within the statutory bounds imposed by the necessity for individual self-cultivation, it is the 'fathers and leaders of the Sangha' who initiate and guide any corporate decision-making process. In most daily matters this is simply a matter of elder exercising authority over younger in terms clearly laid down and for purposes which are never in dispute. But it is also clear that, if policy and decision-making were to overlap, as in a dispute over the meaning of the teaching, or in a matter which the teaching did not treat, there could be difficulties within this group of 'fathers and leaders', each one reliant on his own judgement.

Of course, in the extreme case the king was later to intervene. But let us consider, rather, an occasion represented in the period in which the Vinaya texts took form, when the Sangha was left to its own affairs. Here we leave behind the world of the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, with its ideals, and enter the world of micropolitics as reflected in the detailed Vinaya texts.

In the Vinaya, at *Cullavagga* IV, is presented a series of methods for solving disputes. Of these the most significant consists in the appointment of a committee (*ubbāhikā*) of elder, wise, experienced, and learned monks to solve a dispute within a sangha. The committee is proposed to the disputatious sangha by the traditional announcement, and the appointment is ratified by unanimous silent consent. In so consenting, the disputing sangha also agree to abide by the decision of the committee. The committee itself, however, is not constituted as a sangha, so that its internal workings are not in fact prescribed by the Vinaya. Though the method is but one of several, it is the one which most clearly depends on the real authority structure of the Sangha, the gerontocracy, and in that respect is probably the one which, formally or informally, has been most used throughout Sangha history.

The question, then, is how did this committee work? At *Cullavagga* XII appears an account of events which we take to

be historical, and which are presented as being consummated by the meeting of just such a committee. The dispute itself occurred when the monk Yasa discovered that the monks of Vesāli were advocating ten points of discipline which were at variance with the rules laid down in the Vinaya. Both he and the (unrighteous) monks of Vesāli set about forming a party of learned, distinguished elders to support their respective views on a committee. Much of the account is devoted to canvassing for the righteous party, and though we can hardly assume that it is an accurate account of those distant events, the form in which they are depicted reveals the fundamental lineaments of such a situation. First, the canvassing is done in what is represented as a reasoned and logical manner, each of the points being alluded to in detail before a decision is taken by the individual monk to join the righteous party. Second, the appeal to the monks who join the righteous party is made entirely in terms of their own independent understanding of the teaching. Indeed, those who do eventually join are represented as being reluctant and difficult characters, as though they were a group wandering, each alone, 'like the one horn of the rhinoceros'.

When the matter was turned over to the committee, then, righteousness triumphed, and the committee is represented as having been unanimous. In point of fact it is likely that the notion that it was a committee was imposed after the event, in order to justify it with the legal forms of the preceding text. But my speculation is that, in the key aspects which I have mentioned, this is a fair representation of the constraints on Sangha decision-making. In the absence of formal office and formal procedures of decision-making, the guidance of the Sangha is left to a small, learned group of rugged individualists who must act harmoniously through reasoned face-to-face discussions. In other words, even in the informally constituted group of 'fathers and leaders', the ideals of the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* hold good. And of course, special occasions such as this dispute aside, continual harmony is attained only through continual communication and consultation, 'full and frequent assemblies'.

The *saṃsthāva* likewise appeared in a period in which the Sangha was left pretty much to its own affairs, and its internal

structure recognizably conforms to the picture I have set forth: there is a central group of 'fathers and leaders of the Sangha', mutually autonomous monks, who effectively administer daily affairs and also set long-term policy. Indeed, I would argue that this structure is inevitable, given the principles under which the Sangha operates, so that the constraints which gave rise to the rules themselves, and to the pattern of events at Vesāli, created a similar pattern in the *saṃsthāva*.

Consider the founding of the *saṃsthāva*. Among the resources which Jinavaṃsa had to assemble were a number of experienced elders who could take pupils, and who could also—this is the point—help to form a pure sangha so as to carry out ordinations and other acts of Vinaya. He began with Ñāṇārāma, but enough other monks of the appropriate experience and opinions joined him that they were soon able to cast loose from the Rāmañña Nikāya. One such monk was Ratanapāla. Another was Silālāṃkara, Guṇānanda's original teacher.

These monks were roughly contemporary. That is, though the *etiquette* of respect for age prevailed among them—a monk even one year junior in ordination to another will perform an obeisance on greeting and parting—they did not in fact relate to each other as teacher to pupil. They were, in fine old Sangha style, an association of autonomous individuals, *sabrahmacārino*, fellow-ascetics, voluntarily associating out of their mutual understanding of the Dhamma and the purposes of the Sangha. Most of them were in a vigorous prime, aged about forty to fifty.

Furthermore, there was bound to be a large gap between these monks and their pupils, even the pupils they had already had under them before the founding of the *saṃsthāva*. As I have pointed out, even if a monk takes his higher ordination at the earliest possible age, twenty, he must then remain in *nissaya*, dependence, on another monk for some years thereafter, without taking pupils. This may amount to five or ten years; and in fact I know of no example of a monk taking a pupil before the age of about thirty-five. Let us assume, then, that such a monk did take a pupil at the age of thirty-five, and the pupil's age was a relatively typical fifteen. By the time the pupil became a fully ordained monk his teacher would be twenty years ahead of him in both physical age and in years from ordination . . . old enough to be his father.

Hence there is a generation gap, a fairly informal but effective principle of age-grading, within the *saṃsthāva,* and indeed in the Sangha as a whole. Pupils obey their teachers for the most part, even after leaving dependence, and monks of a younger generation generally obey monks of the older, even if the latter have not been officially their teachers. (And note that a monk, for one purpose or another, will have had several teachers besides his first one, his *upajjhāya.*) On the other hand, the closer monks come to being contemporaries, the closer their relationship comes to one of mutual autonomy.

As far as decision-making and administration are concerned, then, the *saṃsthāva* is guided by that egalitarian group of elders who first joined Jinavaṃsa.

So the question of harmony in the *saṃsthāva* is really a question of harmony within this group, and it is to this group that must be applied the ideal of full and frequent assemblies and of reasoned face-to-face discussion. It is certainly the case that the *saṃsthāva* began with such measures. Jinavaṃsa's meetings with Ratanapāla and Ñāṇārāma, the long discussions which established a basic concord in opinions, and which were followed by frequent meetings and exchanges of letters, were repeated with the other elder monks who joined the *saṃsthāva.* And certainly the continuing harmony of the *saṃsthāva* is in no little measure due to the tireless diplomacy of Jinavaṃsa—as well as to the strong sanctions against dispute which are such a conspicuous feature of Buddhist scriptures.

But what is remarkable, and sets the *saṃsthāva* apart as a successful reform movement, is that every effort has been made to institutionalize these measures. As a firm rule the elders keep in touch with each other continually by post, to the extent that if one of them plans to travel somewhere for even a few days, he will notify one or more of his fellows. This makes of the elders prodigious letter-writers, and every elder member has a bundle of letters from that greatest and most eloquent correspondent of them all, Jinavaṃsa.

Furthermore, members of the *saṃsthāva* make every effort to meet as often as possible. There is an annual gathering of the *saṃsthāva* at the end of the rainy-season retreat at Nimalava, but there are occasionally other gatherings from year to year. And if two hermitages are within relatively easy travelling

distance of each other, their monks may gather for *uposatha* days, or may share invitations to preach. The relatively great effort that is made in these measures matches the relatively great obstacles which stand in the way of a movement spread all over the island. The unbroken continuity of this mutual communication from the very beginning, and the rigorous discipline of its maintenance, contribute more than anything else to the unity of the *saṃsthāva*, despite the powerful forces which continually threaten to turn it into a loose association of isolated village priests.

And indeed much the same rules are applied to the younger monks. On the one hand, they must keep in constant touch with their teacher or teachers, by post if they have been seconded to another hermitage. On the other hand, they are continually shifted around. Guṇānanda has lived in a total of eighteen different places in his twenty-three years with the *saṃsthāva*, and in this he is typical. This serves several purposes—it widens the experience of the pupil, and it prevents attachment to a single place—but it also fosters a broad acquaintance with other monks in the *saṃsthāva*, and therefore its corporate unity.

It is wholly consistent with this government by egalitarian concord among the elders that Jinavaṃsa has consistently refused to take the title *mahānāyaka*, which Ñāṇānanda took, though his own colleagues and pupils have suggested it. To do so would, of course, transgress his own announced principles, which have been so important in his writings and sermons; but it would also go against the grain of the administrative style he has worked so hard to maintain. Nothing could contrast more with the style of Ñāṇānanda, the *mahānāyaka*, who has only lately attained some co-operation among a group of elders who have each gone their own way for twenty-five or thirty years, sometimes after quarrelling bitterly. It is no wonder that, when Ñāṇānanda sent an emissary to Jinavaṃsa to suggest that they amalgamate, he was politely but firmly refused.

The *saṃsthāva* has not avoided all formalization of authority, however. To understand how this occurred, let us return briefly to the origins of the *mahānāyaka* office. I have stressed that the historical precedent for this lay with the hierarchs appointed by Parakkamabāhu and later kings; and in Ñāṇā-

nanda's Ceylon these were represented by the *mahānāyakas* of the Siyam Nikāya in Kandy, and by their regional deputies, some of whom Ñāṇānanda knew and emulated. These look directly to the historical legitimation of their office by the Kandyan kings, and it is remarkable how many of these *nāyakas*, not only in the Kandyan areas but on the south coast as well, claim that their temples are *rāja mahāvihāras*, temples established by kings.

But such offices, whatever their precedent, have some practical function as well. Indeed it is likely that, at least at the lower levels of the hierarchy (the *gaṇadeṭu*, the leaders of groups), the offices recognized by Parakkamabāhu were functionally, if not officially, already present. For, after all, there had obviously been some division of labour within the Sangha in the management of its estates. And certainly a self-identifying group had to have its interests represented in the wider society. More to the point, the modern *nikāyas*, established in Burma and Ceylon after the arrival of the British, have also developed offices, partly on the model of the royal Sangha, but also in response to very real problems of administration, succession, and representation. The Rāmañña Nikāya, for example, has shown a marked tendency to evolve towards a continually more elaborated and formalized group.[2] In that case, as in the case of the *saṃsthāva*, one need in particular stands out: to preserve the unity and concord of the group in a regular and unproblematic way after the original founders have passed away.

Hence the *saṃsthāva* instituted, in about 1968, a *kāraka sabhāva*, an executive committee of ten, of which the members are ideally reappointed, though not necessarily replaced, every five years. As of 1972 the chairman was Gäṭamānnē Vimalavaṃsa, who had been Jinavaṃsa's pupil before the founding of the *saṃsthāva*. The other nine members were first-generation pupils of the *saṃsthāva* founders, or contemporaries of those pupils who had joined from outside. The founders nevertheless retain authority, in what is euphemistically called an 'advisory' (*anuśāsaka*) capacity. A pamphlet on the *saṃsthāva* says, 'A special mark (of the executive committee) is that all duties are carried out according to the specifications of the honourable advisory elders.'

[2] See Urmila Phadnis, *Religion and Politics in Sri Lanka*, C. Hurst (London, 1976), pp. 80–5.

What is very striking about this group is the difference in its attitude from that of the founding elders. The elders quite naturally maintain a perceptibly informal attitude toward the executive committee. The members of the executive committee, on the other hand, removed by twenty years of seniority and a lifetime of pupilship from the sphere of the elders, are visibly stiff and formal, and their prose as regards the *saṃsthāva* and its operations is pompous and legalistic. I suppose we see here, before our very eyes, 'the routinization of charisma', ossification.

In general, then, individual elders retain great authority, especially over their own pupils. Jinavaṃsa in particular may be regarded as *primus inter pares*, both because of his original role and his personal gifts. On the other hand, this personal authority is modified by the wishes of other elders, as represented in what Jinavaṃsa calls the executive committee—actually his contemporaries as well as the officially appointed committee. Consider the balance between personal and corporate authority in the following two examples.

The first concerns a monk whom I will call X. X came to the *saṃsthāva* as a novice, and studied at Galdūva under the tutelage of Jinavaṃsa. He was duly ordained there, but proved a difficult and fractious student. With Jinavaṃsa's grudging approval, he returned to his native area and took over a hermitage. In the wake of the enthusiasm for the Burmese meditation, he began teaching meditation to laymen. This was clearly beyond the purpose of the *saṃsthava*, and Jinavaṃsa wrote to him to tell him to stop it. He did not do so, however, and soon went further: he took the financial affairs of the hermitage into his own hands, began publishing a newspaper, and accepted a car which he had been offered by a rich supporter. This was the last straw: Jinavaṃsa brought a *petsama* (Sinh., petition) before the executive committee.

This is the regular channel through which such complaints are handled. The proceeding itself follows generally, though not in every detail, that outlined in the Vinaya for such accusations.[3] Jinavaṃsa, as accuser, placed the charges before the committee. X was present, and had brought with him another monk, Y, who spoke for him. (Y had previously been

[3] See *Cullavagga* IV, 14.

ejected from the *saṃsthāva.*) In Jinavaṃsa's words:

We instituted a proceeding against X. There were a number of counts. Using money. Getting involved in various transactions. One *saṃghādisesa.* And similar things. We did not accuse him of a *pārājikā* [a defeat, which would mean he would have to leave the robes altogether], though there was some talk of doing so. Y came to the examination with X. Y talked for him. Finally we gave a judgement. Until he purified himself, he was no longer in communion with us. We didn't say *pārājikā.* He could come back, we said, but only if he got clean.

So far Jinavaṃsa had acted through the committee; but it was his authority which had initiated the committee's action, and it was to Jinavaṃsa that X returned to petition for re-admittance. In Jinavaṃsa's words: 'He came here to see me. He brought all sorts of *pirikara* [monk's requisites, such as robes, bowls, soap, etc.]. He brought those things and put them on the table there. That night we talked and I told him that he could come back to us if he would give up all those things. Just desires. Just attachments. Give those things up, get yourself clean . . .'

Q. From the *saṃghādisesa*?

A. That's right. I said do all that, and you can come back to us. Nothing was settled that night. We got up the next day and he asked me again. He pleaded. I told him again: get yourself clean. He offered me the *pirikara.* I said take it all and go. So he went, yelling.

Clearly it is Jinavaṃsa's authority as a leader, as a teacher, and as the founder of the *saṃsthāva* which operates here, though the necessary ratification was available through the executive committee. It is significant, however, that even his authority did not reach beyond the bounds of the *saṃsthāva*, and X still flourishes; he has recently built a large meditation centre hard by one of Ceylon's busiest highways.

But Jinavaṃsa is also subject to correction by his colleagues, as in the following case. One of the rules of the *saṃsthāva* is that no novice who is younger than seventeen can be taken. There are many reasons for this, but perhaps the most important one is practical: younger boys would have to be fed, clothed, and attended to, which would interfere with the monks' work. Yet, because the *saṃsthāva* appeals to the romantic spirit of many youngsters, the monks often have to turn away applicants because they are too young. Jinavaṃsa described a boy who had wanted to become a monk from the age of seven:

He didn't want to do anything else, didn't want to go to school, just wanted to be a monk. And he couldn't be ordained in a *pansala*, it had to be the forest monks. His parents came to me and said that they couldn't do anything with him, could he be ordained, please? I told them to bring him back when he was seventeen. When he was fourteen, a couple of years later, he ran away and went to Galdūva. I wasn't there, I was at Kurundugolla. They didn't know what to do with him so they sent him to me. I kept him here and he worked around the place. But I started getting letters from different members of the executive committee. They didn't like it. They told me to get rid of the boy. So I sent a letter to the parents and told them to come and get him.

There are two important differences between this case and the preceding one. First, the members of the executive committee objected to Jinavaṃsa's actions, whereas they had not in the previous example; and Jinavaṃsa, in the interest of harmony, bowed to their wishes. Second, whereas in the first example it was a matter of discipline, and therefore of policy laid down not so much by the *saṃsthāva* as the Vinaya, in this it was specifically a matter of *saṃsthāva* policy: the Vinaya allows boys as young as seven years, 'old enough to frighten a crow', to enter the Sangha. It is roughly a difference between administration and policy decision-making, and the authority of elders runs in the former, whereas group authority has to be enlisted for the latter.

There are in fact many matters on which the Vinaya does not speak, but which are nevertheless vital to the preservation of the *saṃsthāva*'s purpose, the cultivation of a meditative life. In general, the *saṃsthāva's* policy decisions on these matters may be regarded as attempts—so far successful—to keep the *saṃsthāva* from decaying into a village Sangha: attempts, that is, to avoid practices which are not themselves against the Vinaya, but which would create within the *saṃsthāva* those conditions under which village monks easily and naturally come to ignore Vinaya rules. This is a much more subtle threat than indiscipline, for the lay supporters of the *saṃsthāva*, and many monks in the *saṃsthāva* as well, are used to the relatively innocent practices of the village Sangha, and it is not always very clear where the line should be drawn.

One of the chief issues is education: for the *saṃsthāva*, monastic education is strictly for the purpose of self-cultivation, while, for the village Sangha, it is either for ceremonial purposes or for pure scholarship. Presently the *saṃsthāva* provides all teaching of Pali, Sinhalese, and scriptures at its training centres. For a while, however, it was sending students to the Koggala Tripiṭika Dharmāyatanaya, a seminary at which Vimalavaṃsa, the chairman of the *kāraka sabhāva*, had taught. The decision to break with the seminary was the result of a wholly innocent initiative on the part of some lay supporters. In Jinavaṃsa's words:

> Some of our monks were learning Dhamma at Koggala. One day some lay supporters in Colombo suggested that some of the students be sent to the [very prestigious] Buddhaśravaka Dhamma Piṭṭaniya [seminary] in Anurādhapura. So they sent a letter to me asking permission to send the monks there. I wrote back immediately and said that that sort of work had nothing to do with us. We're not training writers or scholars. That was the main reason we broke our ties with that place.

Jinavaṃsa traces the decline of the Rāmañña Nikāya to monks being given salaries at monastic universities. While this may be too simple a view, it is certainly the case that higher education generally seems to lead monks away from the strict observance of virtuoso life.

The expectations and generosity of lay supporters is a constant problem. The ease with which a monk can return to the habits I have associated with the village Sangha is clear from X's career, which was enthusiastically supported by laymen. This temptation is constantly present to all the monks of the *saṃsthāva*. It need not, in fact, be greed or ambition which motivates them to unprofitable dealings with their local lay supporters; it may equally well be concern for the latter's welfare, or unwillingness to contradict a layman's expectations that they act as parish priests. One of a monk's chief services to laymen is the chanting of *pirit* (protective verses), sometimes until dawn, to ward off misfortune, or to aid the recovery of the sick. This is a particular case of a more general service, the production of merit (*pin*), which is done at merit-making ceremonies (*pinkam*). These are often expensive, lengthy, and busy affairs, quite at odds with the meditative ideal of the *saṃsthāva*.

In view of their experience with the village Sangha, whose status is legitimated in the village by performance of *pinkam*, lay supporters naturally expect the same services from meditating monks.

The *saṃsthāva* has dealt with this problem in a variety of ways. The most drastic is to abandon a hermitage altogether. I know of at least five instances in which they have done so, of which the most instructive is perhaps the first, Devagoḍa. There the laymen had shown themselves very willing to help the *saṃsthāva*, and had undergone considerable difficulties (building *kuṭi*s in a downpour) to support the monks. In Jinavaṃsa's words:

We had to leave Devagoḍa because the lay supporters, who had gone to such trouble for us, wanted us to come and preach. They wanted us to chant *pirit* till dawn. They wanted the monks to keep coming out for *pinkam* and alms-givings. The only reason the monks would go out, though, was to beg their food. The laymen went ahead, at our advice, to get other monks from nearby temples to come for *pirit* and the like. They began to use the temple for that purpose. That was all right—there was enough space there for everything. But it got to be more and more trouble, and finally we left.

In another interview, Jinavaṃsa mentioned that the 'trouble' was partially due to other monks who lived at the temple, but who were opposed to the presence, and purpose, of the *saṃsthāva*. They said that the *saṃsthāva* worked according to a 'strange method' (*amutu kramaya*). Jinavaṃsa on the other hand speaks of village Sangha practices as 'extraneous work' (*bāhira väḍa*).

The *saṃsthāva* does not, however, withdraw all spiritual services from laymen. Monks are allowed to accept invitations to people's homes, and they are allowed to chant *pirit*. To limit their involvement, however, they may not accept invitations too often, and must not chant for more than a few hours. Above all, they must leave in the evening to return to sleep at the hermitage. These regulations are the fruit of bitter experience.

By the same token, the *saṃsthāva* ensures that laymen who offer to build a new hermitage are fully informed of these limitations imposed on its monks. In fact a great deal of Jinavaṃsa's preaching effort, since the very earliest days of his reform, has been devoted to educating laymen on those details

of Vinaya which circumscribe a monk's life, but which are not usually practised by the village Sangha.

Thus, for example, one afternoon Jinavaṃsa received a group of laymen in my presence. He spoke to them about their reasons for coming: apparently a baby had died, and they had come to offer food and other necessities to the monks in order to transfer merit to the dead child. Jinavaṃsa then turned easily to a sermon, in which he explained that giving to monks is done to cultivate virtues (this is the basic psychological explanation of merit) so that one day they might achieve Nirvana. At the end of the sermon they offered him kerosene and honey, which he accepted; and a large bowl of fruit which he rejected. He told them: 'It is not proper to offer monks fruit after 12 noon. They may accept things which keep, such as kerosene or honey, but they may not accept food. Solid food may be offered between 5 a.m. and 12 noon. Between 12 noon and the next morning monks may only accept liquids, and that for health purposes. We can drink the juice of fruits, may accept the juice of fruits, but we may not accept a fruit.' The laymen then filed out slowly, protesting that they always gave these things to the village monk, who accepted them. It may be objected that it came to the same in the end, for the laymen simply gave the fruit to the kitchen servants to prepare for the monks; yet it is precisely by such careful observance of the discipline that the *saṃsthāva* identify, and persevere in, their purpose.

This level of strict practice requires, as we have seen, that however firmly the *saṃsthāva* keeps the administration of discipline and education in the monks' hands, the administration of hermitage property and support of the monks must lie in lay hands. The monks' attitude to lay support was explained to me by Jinavaṃsa: he mentioned that the Mr Hettige who so generously endowed the *saṃsthāva*'s training centre at Puhulvälla had offered similar support to Ñāṇārāma in the 1930s, when he was at Baṭuviṭa with his teacher, Vanaratana. Mr Hettige's plan was to completely re-fit the hermitage. Ñāṇārāma was amenable to the plan, but, in Jinavaṃsa's words:

When Hettige went to Vanaratana, Vanaratana told him that if he did that, it would completely destroy the hermitage. Completely destroy the hermitage. Why do you suppose he said that, sir?

A: Well, I imagine he thought that a hermitage should be modest.

If Hettige did that, the hermitage would become a grand place, and maybe that wouldn't be very good for the monks.

Jinavaṃsa: I say that was a great mistake. Vanaratana was mistaken. A monk should be satisfied with whatever he gets. If some layman comes and says he wants to spend a million rupees on a hermitage, let him. The monk should say nothing.

I'll give you an example. In 1956 or '57, I was invited to spend the rainy-season retreat at Ravana Älla. It is very damp and cold there. The supporters said that these were hermitage monks, so they fixed me a *mässa* [a string cot] to sleep on. It was just a mud hut. I had been in the hospital for weeks with pleurisy. I was not well yet. But I didn't say a thing. I went, and I didn't complain at all. That is what a monk must do. That was Vanaratana's great mistake.

Though the answer was not entirely apposite, the point is clear enough: by Vinaya rule the monk is to take what he is given. In fact a delicate adjustment is required, for on the one hand the monks must retain their autonomy, without mingling too much in the administration of property, while on the other the property must be administered in general accord with their needs and wishes.

In practice the organization of physical facilities and support for the monks is often best left in the hands of well-educated, rich, and influential laymen: well-educated, because they can understand and respond to the peculiar needs of the *saṃsthāva*; rich, because they control the (increasingly) scarce resources, such as land, which the *saṃsthāva* needs; and influential, because in a Ceylon which still retains much of its feudal social heritage, men of wealth are also men of power, who can marshal support among the people. The history of the *saṃsthāva*—indeed, the history of the Sangha from its earliest days in India—is marked by the patronage of the rich and influential. In this respect it is significant that, at the five hermitages of the *saṃsthāva* in the Kandyan area about whose lay supporters I have information, the chief organizers and chairmen of the supporters' committees (*dāyaka sabhā*) are all schoolteachers or merchants from the Low Country: men, that is, who are wealthy and well-educated by Kandyan village standards. At the large centres in the Low Country, support is undertaken by men such as Hettige, who are relatively quite rich.

At such centres, however, the philanthropist is seldom himself responsible for the daily administration of the hermitage.

Rather a lay manager will be employed, often a retired or elderly gentleman with some religious aspirations, who is glad to associate with the monks. At small hermitages, the committee and its chairman are directly responsible for the day-to-day maintenance of the monks and their facilities.

This is not to say that only the upper crust have access to the *saṃsthāva*. In small hermitages the committees, aside from their leadership, are composed of average villagers. And at larger centres, though the greatest single items of capital expenditure may be purchased, or their purchase organized, by the wealthy, it is the relatively poor who give most of the daily alms and who provide most of the audiences. And indeed at all such centres, including those outside the *saṃsthāva* as well, the manager is in charge of arranging for busloads of pilgrims to come and offer alms. In this respect, just as the *saṃsthāva* was founded largely through the amenities of modern communications, so it is supported thereby.

A glance at some figures concerning the *saṃsthāva* as a whole reveals both its health as an institution and its unremittingly high standards.[4] As of 1972, there were 44 hermitages and training centres, spread throughout the Sinhalese part of the island. This represents complete fulfilment of Jinavaṃsa's aspirations to have monks everywhere in Ceylon rising, worshipping, and meditating at the same time. As of 1975 there were 104 fully ordained monks and 109 novices. It was Jinavaṃsa's original plan to limit the *saṃsthāva* to 100 fully ordained monks. The attrition rate is high, particularly among the novices. 132 (monks; but most were novices) have been ejected (*ivat kaḷa*) by the *saṃsthāva*, and 125 have left the robes voluntarily, out of 446 who took the lower ordination. Some left because they could not measure up to the *saṃsthāva*'s academic standards, or, more often, to its disciplinary standards. Others could not stand it for health reasons—the monks do not eat well, and lead a hard life—; or for psychological reasons: not everyone can stand the celibacy, the isolation, or the stress of meditation.

Perhaps a clearer picture of the attrition rate can be gained by considering the fate of the first twelve monks who were taken as novices by the *saṃsthāva*. One teaches at Galdūva, another at

[4] These figures were kindly provided by Nāuyanē Ariyadhamma, one of Jinavaṃsa's pupils and among the chief teachers at Galdūva.

Puhulvälla. Four others are living at hermitages, where they are meditating, though they may have a pupil from time to time. Of the remaining six, one died early. Three others were constantly ill, so returned to lay life; and one went insane after he had gone off alone to do *kasiṇa* meditation.[5] The roughly fifty per cent attrition rate, then, represents both the difficulties of the life and the hardiness of those who survive. Releasing oneself from suffering is not, apparently, an undertaking for the feeble.

[5] My informant could not trace the twelfth.

Wisdom and Loving-Kindness

CHAPTER 13
Conclusion

> As monks, our efforts are accompanied by . . . material hardships and physical discomfort, but by a steady and sure increase in the well-being of our mind and spirit which renders our physical being insignificant to the point where physical discomfort no longer exists, where we are within reach of our goal: Sanggye Sa (Nirvana). Yet it is a goal that we cannot desire in itself, for in itself it is the annihilation of desire, the cessation of suffering, which comes through desire. Our minds then, are not so much set on the goal as on the path.
>
> Thubten Jigme Norbu and Colin Turnbull, *Tibet.*

> He who lives continually cherishing thoughts of compassion or pity for the suffering of other beings, fully realizes the evil of the physical body or of any material form, subject, as it is, to ill and pain.
>
> Vajiranāṇa Mahāthera, *Buddhist Meditation.* From the commentary to the *Haliddavasana Sutta.*

There is one monk, Tāmbugala Ānandasiri, whose career is a living summary of all that has gone before: he knew the uncompromising Ratanapāla, he was a pupil of that distant admirer of the forest life, Devarakkhita, and was closely associated with Ñāṇānanda; he handed Tāpasa Himi the fateful pamphlet, later became a *tāpasayā* himself—though a soberer one by a soberer name—and finally joined the Rāmañña Nikāya. His final move was to Jinavaṃsa's *saṃsthāva*, where he is now on the executive committee. Born in 1930, he grew to youth and early manhood with the forest-dwelling movement itself, and therefore formed and was formed by it in a thorough and impassioned way, throughout his intellectual and emotional growth. He in fact recapitulates the burning questions of his age, place and station: is enlightenment possible? How can the Buddha's teaching be revived? What is meditation? His present views, indeed his way of life, are the product of those questions, and of

that age of questioning, which might be said to have finished when a new generation of aspirants, not yet born in 1956, grew up to find hermitages already established and waiting. He admits, when pressed, to having been in his day something of a revolutionary (*viplavakarayā*), but his rebellion was no more disruptive than most of the other hermitage founders', and had the same objective, to shake off the bonds of the village Sangha. He is neither an average hermit monk, nor a more profound thinker than some of his elders. However, he also reinvented the forest life, and his version, because it has reached such a ripe and integral consummation, may fairly claim to represent the hermitage movement, and therefore to be a fitting conclusion to a study of the movement.

His rebelliousness began early. When Ānandasiri was about fifteen, in 1945, he became the servant and lay pupil of his maternal uncle, Dēvarakkhita, who had founded the seminary for forest monks. He refused, however, to train for the village Sangha, to take over his uncle's temples, and instead he was ordained as a novice under Mänikdivela Dēvānanda, Ñāṇānanda's close friend and colleague. Later, when he and his peers were to be ordained monks, he led an attempt to have the group admitted to the Sangha at the hands of forest-dwelling monks alone. And it was he whose criticism of the ordination, at the hands of the Kandyan village monks, led to the dispersal of that first group of pupils.

He himself left by about 1952, to become a *tāpasayā*, and soon he joined forces with the Vinayavardhana people, who at that time were still concerned, as their name implies, with the 'protection of the Vinaya'. As Ānandasiri saw it, their purpose was to criticize and improve the Sangha, and to discover whether there was still a valid ordination tradition—the present traditions having been, in their and Ānandasiri's eyes, irretrievably ruined by being passed on by unvirtuous monks—in Burma or Thailand. He acted as an adviser to the Vinayavardhana society for many years, but by the late fifties he discovered that his name was being attached to pamphlets which contained uninformed opinions which were, furthermore, virulently anti-Sangha. He broke with them, but his reputation as a 'revolutionary' was established thereby, and when he later came to apply for admission to Jinavaṃsa's *saṃsthāva*, some members of

the executive committee strongly opposed it. Jinavaṃsa had to exert all his diplomatic skills to bring them round.

It is not, I think, that the members of the executive committee were mistaken in their estimate of Ānandasiri's capacity for being awkward, but rather that they misjudged its source. The energy of his opposition to the religious establishment was founded in his eagerness to find a trustworthy ordination tradition in order to enter fully into the original forest-dweller's way of life. In 1962 he had gone to sit at the feet of a very learned and ascetic elder of the Rāmañña Nikāya who still harked back to the *nikāya*'s early inspiration, and, duly convinced of the genuineness of the ordination tradition, Ānandasiri joined. It was only a short step from there to joining Jinavaṃsa in 1971. Jinavaṃsa stood surety for Ānandasiri's obedience—Ānandasiri speaks of him as his teacher—and Ānandasiri has indeed been a fully responsible member of the *saṃsthāva* since. Thus one of the outstanding questions of his life was solved.

But his ambition was not merely, or even mainly, to achieve a proper ordination. He did not share the ambition of Dēvarakkhita and Ñāṇānanda, to revive the specifically Sinhalese ideal of the Sangha. His imagination and energy were directed from the beginning toward a quite different and, under the circumstances, quite shockingly radical goal: to follow in the footsteps of the Buddha. In a rhetorical sense, of course, this is what all the other monks conceived themselves to be doing. But none conceived the matter in quite the way he did. For Ñāṇānanda and his colleagues it came as a shock when Ānandasiri asked them in discussion how much effort it would take to become a Buddha, rather than follow the commentarial pattern and become an *arhat*.[1] On another occasion he pointed out to an interlocutor that he hoped to pursue *paññā*, wisdom, just as the Buddha had done in countless lives, as recounted in the Jātaka tales. And the shock must have also been great when he told a monk, who had advised him against leaving his ordination, that he merely wished to follow the Buddha, who had gone from group to group among the salvation-seekers of ancient India. In so phrasing the matter Ānandasiri was im-

[1] The chief difference between a Buddha and an *arhat* lies in the fact that the Buddha *discovers* the truth and teaches it to the world, while *arhats* rediscover it, and merely enjoy the fruits of enlightenment.

plicitly rejecting the structure of piety which had accreted over two and a half millennia, and which allowed the thesis that Nirvana was no longer possible, for example, to seem quite reasonable. He may have got this radical sense of history—straight back to the roots—indirectly from Western scholarship, which had been concerned in this period with discovering an 'original' Buddhism, beside which everything else, including the commentarial tradition, would be considered merely of secondary interest. He does not know English, but even now, in middle age, he is eager to entertain ideas on Buddhist history, philosophy, and the meditative life whatever their source—even from visiting anthropologists. But if, as is also quite possible, his radicalism is wholly indigenous, it is nonetheless very much at odds with received Sinhalese ideas.

The measure of what was seen by many as his hubris is the intimacy with which he thought of that ideal in the Buddha's life, the attainment of *paññā*. For, as he put it to me, he viewed the Buddha's advice, 'Make yourself your island, yourself and no other your refuge,' as meaning that 'I had to find the truth that made sense to me'. Indeed, he was intent, not on the traditional hope of a little progress, a better rebirth, but on enlightenment (*avabodha vīma*), on actual penetration (*paṭivedha*) and understanding of the Dhamma, rather than on mere practice (*paṭipatti*). One can understand, then, that a certain feverish impatience may have accompanied his early strivings, and made him more obstreperous than he now seems.

There was certainly an intellectualist slant in his attitude. Part of this, of course, is inherent in the doctrine itself with its emphasis on intelligence and understanding; part is due to the scholastic and educational heritage of the Sangha; and part was no doubt temperamental. In the four years before he left his ordination with the Siyam Nikāya he attended a seminary, but left that and continued to study on his own. He said:

At that time I read constantly in the Dhamma and Vinaya, and I learned as much as I could. I discussed matters (*sākacchā keruvā*) with the old Mahākanda monk who lived nearby. He was a very learned monk, and very knowledgeable on many issues. He was perfectly honest, so that he would say exactly what he knew and what he didn't know; and if he didn't know he would try to find the answer and tell

you later. . . . I also went to confer with the Vajirārāma monks in Colombo . . . . I read and talked sometimes for days on end.

Throughout his descriptions of his life Ānandasiri continually uses the words 'investigate', 'discuss', or 'question' (*vimasanavā*, *sākacchā karanavā*, *praśna karanavā*) to describe his activity: and a good deal of his judgement of others is based on whether they use the same faculties. Indeed, by the time he went to sit at the feet of the Rāmañña Nikāya monk in 1962, he had brought this to a fine art: he kept a notebook in which he wrote down all the questions he wished to ask that elder.

But, intellectualist though he may seem, Ānandasiri was also willing—indeed this was the whole point of the enquiry—to experiment in the flesh. In this he had the precedent of Ñāṇānanda and his fellows, who had tried out new techniques in many aspects of the monk's life, from meditation, through begging their food, to dyeing their robes with tree bark to get that rich brown colour so beloved of forest monks. But Ānandasiri, though in a gentler tradition, was as willing as that generation of Russian thinkers and revolutionaries to follow his conclusions wherever they took him.[2] His logical consequences, in other words, were practical consequences—and in fact they are of particular interest as a commentary on the social and psychological nature of the hermitage life.

Let us follow the train of Ānandasiri's concrete reasoning. In that early period of the hermitage revival, before Ānandasiri left the Siyam Nikāya, the *Visuddhimagga* exerted a tremendous fascination upon the aspiring forest-dwellers. It had been read by Ratanapāla and Ñāṇānanda in their first retreat together, for example. Furthermore, precisely because of their emblematic association with asceticism, the *dhutanga*s and the *kasiṇa* meditations, both of which are especially thoroughly treated in the *Visuddhimagga*, came in for a great deal of attention. Monks of all types, inside and outside the hermitage movement, were trying their hands at them. And one can understand why: they are just complicated enough to be mysterious, and seem to promise quite spectacular results . . . or results, at least, which

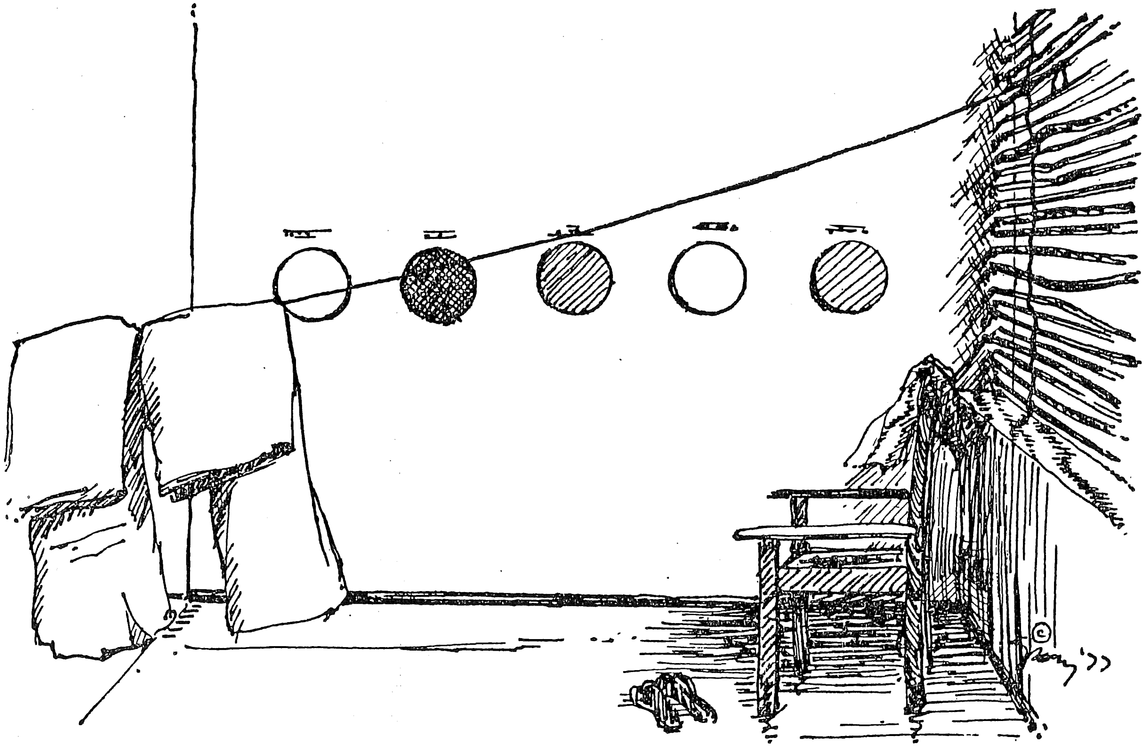
[2] See Isaiah Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, The Hogarth Press (London, 1978), pp. 128–30, 205–6.

were so different from the ordinary experience of monks that they seemed spectacular.

Ānandasiri, of course, plunged enthusiastically into this experimentation. On the one hand, he tried all the *dhutangas*. He stayed up all night, he lived in the open—at the time he was staying atop the rock at Māligātänna, a lovely and isolated spot for such practices—and he spent some time living in a cemetery. On the other, he meditated, often through the night, on one or another of the *kasiṇa* devices. The goal of these, as I have noted, is to concentrate the mind on a single object or quality, such as the colour blue, or light, or the element earth considered in its solidity and extension, or fire, or even space. What these have in common is that they are objects relatively simplified, and therefore suitable for an attempt to concentrate the mind on a single thing, excluding all other thoughts and sensations. The consequences, after initial difficulties, are generally pleasant[3]—the meditator experiences zest (*pīti*) and pleasure (*sukha*)—but in time he refines these away until he sinks into a state characterized chiefly by one-pointedness and equanimity. It is also, according to the interviews and pamphlets available to me, quite common to have things get out of perspective, precisely because of the effort to exclude all other thoughts and sensations. The meditator may in fact see visions, sometimes pleasing and exalting, sometimes horrifying, sometimes sexual. No wonder there was so much interest and so much confusion over the *kasiṇas*.

Ānandasiri does seem to have progressed satisfactorily in the *kasiṇa* meditation at the time—he still indulges in it occasionally—and his innate scepticism seems to have kept from him any very distressing or distracting consequences (though he did once see a fearsome character, bulging with muscle, stalking toward him out of the sea). But the experiment, as regards both the *dhutangas* and the *kasiṇas*, led in the first instance to a negative conclusion. In Ānandasiri's words: 'I got discouraged (*kalakirunā*) with these *dhutangas* and the *kasiṇa* meditations. I had done them, and I thought that, as far as they went, they were very good. But there was no meaning in them. They did not

[3] For an attempt to use the *jhāna* scheme as a foundation for a systematic psychology of altered states of consciousness, see Daniel Goleman, *The Varieties of the Meditative Experience*, Rider and Co. (London, 1978).



Kasiṇa meditation device. The circles are composed of different colours or materials, to be used in the *kasiṇa* meditation described in the Conclusion and Chapter 11. The hermitage at which they are found is near Mihintale, and belongs to Ñāṇānanda's group.

lead to wisdom.' Nor, in point of fact, do the texts represent them as leading to wisdom, or as being anything more than special exercises directed toward specific and very circumscribed ends. But under the circumstances of excitement this conclusion, arrived at the hard way, was in Ānandasiri's view a very real gain.

And the conclusion had a positive corollary, for having eliminated the special practices, there seemed to Ānandasiri to be only one alternative: 'One must live a wise (*prajñāvat*) life, intelligently and mindfully (*sihinuvanin*), according to the old daily schedule (*dina carikāva*). One must live that way, intelligently, following the life step by step in such a way that one develops awareness (*vipassanā*).' This could be regarded as the master precept of Ānandasiri's later life; it is what he tries to pass on to his pupils, by constantly adjuring them to investigate and question, alertly and with one's intelligence, whether such-and-such a teaching or such-and-such a practice is useful or useless, meaningful or meaningless, wise or foolish. He rejected ascetic mysticism, in other words, for psychological pragmatism.

The far from bloodless, and very *concrete* reasoning which underlies this movement from one commitment to another in fact recapitulates certain strictures found in canonical sources, in sermons of the Buddha, to which I will turn shortly. But it was not a simple matter of putting into practice prescriptions found in the canon, though Ānandasiri had certainly read the relevant material. Rather, Ānandasiri's reproduction of the Buddha's life took place at a deeper level, at the level of reproducing that attitude of skilful discrimination, of the application of intellect to the smallest things of daily life, which is so conspicuous a feature of the Buddha's style as represented in the Theravāda scriptures. All this is embodied in that word so beloved of Ānandasiri, *sihinuvanin*: it means simultaneously 'alertly', 'intelligently', and 'mindfully', and is certainly a very large part of what he means by 'wisdom', *paññā*.

Now let me follow Ānandasiri's reasoning in detail, through some of those texts he pored over so eagerly. I will begin with his relegation of the *kasiṇa* meditations to a minor role.

According to the canon, the Buddha too had also cultivated the same states of trance which are achieved through the *kasiṇas*, before his enlightenment, but had turned to other

methods.[4] The substantive reasons for so doing are given in the *Sallekha Sutta.*[5] In that discourse the trance states, which are exhaustively noted, are called 'abiding comfortably in the present', a recognition of the satisfactions to be found in them. They are treated as being of only temporary and provisional value, however, in contrast with *sallekha*, which Rhys Davids, with more poetic than literal truth, has translated as 'the higher life'.[6] The Buddha explicitly says that, as opposed to the trance states in which thought is suppressed, profitable thinking is to be cultivated: 'I say, Cunda, that just so the exertion of thought is very conducive to profitable states of mind.'[7] A list is then given of the ways in which one is to exert oneself mentally. The list is arranged roughly with the more elementary states of mind first, followed by those which are more difficult, more rarefied, and more specifically Buddhist. Among the first, for example, are diligence, learning, confidence, and a sense of shame.

It is later in the list that those virtues appear upon which Ānandasiri places greatest emphasis. Monks, the discourse asserts, are to 'have mindfulness set up' (*upaṭṭhitasatī*), and not be 'of confused mindfulness' (*muṭṭhassatī*); they are to be 'endowed with wisdom' (*paññāsampannā*). And—this is the last in the list, and seems to be the most important—monks are to be 'unattached to the here and now, not grasp after situations, relinquish (frames of mind) easily' (*asandiṭṭhiparāmāsi-anādhānagāhi-suppaṭinissaggī*). Between them these define that cultivated sensibility the attainment of which is the goal of Buddhist meditation. Mindfulness, of course, is meant to dwell immediately upon the monk's experience, and this is the first step, the 'setting up' of an alert self-consciousness. But, far from being a random or purposeless self-consciousness, it is to be directed toward the three properties (*lakkhanā*) of existence which are relevant to liberation: impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and absence of a compellingly real essence. In so viewing the world, then, the monk is 'endowed with wisdom', and he is able to cultivate that skill of continual and immediate renuncia-

[4] See the *Ariyapariyesana Sutta*, MN. I. 26.

[5] MN. I. 8.

[6] His entry in the *Buddhist Dictionary*. Miss Horner, with more literal than poetic truth, rendered it as 'expunging' in her translation of the passage.

[7] Cittuppādam pi kho ahaṃ Cunda kusalesu dhammesu bahukāraṃ vadāmi.

tion which allows the unsatisfactoriness of existence to leave him untouched, 'like water rolling off a lotus leaf'. This is being 'unattached to the here and now, not grasping after situations'.

This is an injunction, in other words, to a dynamic and continually self-transcending sensibility, as opposed to the static states of mind attempted in the *kasiṇa* meditations. The importance of this central idea of renunciation, of relinquishment, is certified in one of the most famous sermons of the Buddha, the 'simile of the raft'.[8] There he gives the example of a man travelling in a rainstorm, who is confronted with a river in full flood. The man builds a raft and crosses the flood safely. The Buddha asks the monks whether the man would be wise then to put the raft on his head and take it along with him. The monks reply that he would not be wise to do so. The Buddha then asks whether the man would be wise to discard the raft and go on without it. The monks reply that he would be wise to do so. Then the Buddha says: 'Thus, monks, the simile of the raft has been preached by me, for crossing over, not for grasping on to. You, by understanding the simile of the raft, should discard even profitable states, let alone the unprofitable.' The effect of this constant activity of mental renunciation the Buddha describes elsewhere: '(The monk) neither constructs, nor wills in order to produce, any state of mind, or destruction of any state of mind. By not so willing, he grasps after nothing; by not grasping, he is not anxious; he is therefore fully calmed within.'[9]

In other words, from a doctrinal point of view, the (even very refined) comfort of the trance states is nevertheless, like more worldly comforts, 'constructed',[10] composed by conditions; and of course is constructed because it is desirable. But in so far as this is the case, it is also inherently evanescent, and its loss is unsatisfactory; and in any case it is devoid of any commanding essence. Hence the monk must be ready to discard even these relatively helpful states of mind. From Ānandasiri's emotional point of view, it was their very static and limited nature which condemned them to a peripheral role: they 'had no meaning', they 'did not lead to wisdom'. It was precisely that more dynamic consummation, the exercise of his discriminative faculty in insight (*vipassanā*), that drew Ānandasiri on.

[8] MN. I. 22. [9] MN. III. 140.

[10] Etaṃ sankhataṃ. In the *Dhātuvibhanga Sutta*, MN. III. 140.

Though I have tried to make that accomplished skill of mind, insight, seem more palpable and less purely intellectual by likening it to a sensibility, like an artist's sensibility, both immediate and trained through use, there is no doubt that it does demand an engagement of the intellective faculties in the processes of daily experience—and an engagement the deeper because it is the main business of a carefully ordered life. But to say that the engagement is intellectual or discriminative is not to deny that it has its entrancing pleasure as well. Or, one might say, it has not so much the static pleasure of a fulfilled appetite, but the more difficult *joy*—to use the word in a relatively technical sense—of a skill wielded well and to good effect. This is described by Jinavaṃsa in a letter to Ānandasiri, which the latter had printed and distributed. Jinavaṃsa wrote: 'Satisfaction in the Dhamma increases through witnessing immediately (*pratyakṣa vīmen*) the variegations of one's mind. This is the attitude of accomplishment.' This is further explained by the Thai monk Phra Mahā Boowa Ñāṇasampanno, in a book recommended by a German monk who has lived in Ānandasiri's hermitage:

> At this level, the person who is doing the practice will be completely absorbed in his research into the true nature of the Khandas and Sabhava Dhammas ['the variegations of one's own mind'] . . . , and he will hardly be able to lie down and sleep because of the strength of the energy in the basis of his nature, which searches by means of wisdom into the Khandas and Sabhava Dhammas without resting or stopping . . . .[11]

In this view, interest (in the sense of introspectively investigative interest, *dhamma-vicaya*) effectively replaces habitual craving as the spring of action.

Nor indeed is this very alien to a certain kind of modern Western sensibility, as exemplified in the choice of topic and presentation in the novels of James Joyce or Virginia Woolf: it is not in the consummation of a long series of events, in the finale of a plot, that the significance lies, but in each moment, in each introspective insight, in each 'ineluctable modality of the visible'. (I will wish to suggest shortly, however, that in the

[11] Phra Mahā Boowa Ñāṇasampanno, *Forest Dhamma*, Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation (Bangkok, 1973), p. 28.

Buddhist case this does not issue in amoral estheticism, but in the effective, if circumscribed, exercise of compassion.)

Many of the same strictures that Ānandasiri applied to the *kasiṇa* meditations are relevant to the *dhutanga*s as well. Though they have a limited place and a limited purpose in the cultivation of this or that mental quality, such as frugality or energy, such qualities are no less 'constructed' by desire, and therefore no less conducive to grasping rather than renunciation. In contrast, the simple observation of the daily schedule, with which Ānandasiri wished to replace the rigours of the special ascetic practices, is not an object of desire, any more than breathing is an object of desire: it is merely the condition, the medium, in which the monk lives. With its slow progression of daily tasks (such as cleaning the hermitage, gathering alms, cleaning up after eating, personal hygiene) and meditation, it is conducive to careful, mindful reflection at every moment. Since every act is conceived out of necessity, rather than out of self-indulgence or self-mortification, desire has no place in it.

In other words, the hallmark of the daily schedule, as of insight, is the principle of psychological pragmatism, of practicality. In giving oneself up to strict observance of the daily round, one effectively gives up both remorse and anxiety. In the words of a canonical poem quoted in this context by Ānandasiri: 'Not grieving over the past, not yearning after the future, [the monks] live in the present, and thereby their aspect is pleasing.'[12] The daily schedule is in fact rather demanding; but it is nevertheless far from the intentional self-mortification censured by the Buddha. In the words of the Tibetan monk Thubten Jigme Norbu, healthy psychological—and, in Ānandasiri's view, physical—consequences logically ensue from this way of life: 'As monks, our efforts are accompanied by . . . material hardships and physical discomfort, but by a steady and sure increase in the well-being of our mind and spirit which renders our physical being insignificant to the point where physical discomfort no longer exists, where we are within reach of our goal.'[13] And the Tibetan, like Ānandasiri, views the

[12] SN. I. 2. 10.

[13] Ānandasiri, who enjoys the blessings of 'organic hardihood', in William James' phrase, does not insist so much on the disjunction of physical dis-ease and mental ease. Within the limits of what by most standards is a very difficult life, both

objective of this way of life as immediate, rather than deferred: 'Yet it is a goal that we cannot desire in itself, for in itself it is the annihilation of desire, the cessation of suffering, which comes through desire. Our minds then, are not so much set upon the goal as on the path.'[14]

In this view, of course, the monk's way of life is more than merely a means to an end: it is very nearly the end in itself. And indeed one never gets the idea from the canon and commentaries that a monk who attains release might then hang up his robes and do something else: the goal is wholly within the ambit of the monk's life. In the perspective of someone faced with the problems which faced Ānandasiri, this modest conclusion, that one must 'follow the life step by step in such a way that one develops awareness', is in fact a profound discovery that would lead him to unexpected consequences. But in terms of doctrine and the canonical precedents, it was already prefigured. For it is a firmly held view in Theravāda, written not only explicitly but implicitly throughout both texts and social ceremony, that only monks attain liberation. In the stirring message of the Buddha to his monks which is taken as the charter for Buddhism's proselytization, for example, monks are enjoined to go out and preach, 'for the happiness of the many and the welfare of the world'. What they are to preach, however, is *not* a specific philosophical message, not a Protestant religion for everyone, but . . . 'the absolutely perfect and completely pure life of celibate renunciation'.[15] The rigid separation of monk from layman is a bedrock on which the edifice of Theravāda spiritual life is founded. At best, it results in an exalted professionalism; at worst, in obscurantism.[16] Beside this both Mahāyāna and the Burmese meditation centres of modern Ceylon and the West are departures, creative no doubt, profound, but heterodox.

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physically and mentally, he insists that happiness, and especially physical happiness, are necessary to successful pursuit of the life. In this he can point to good canonical precedents, and indeed this is only the principle of psychological pragmatism over again.

[14] Thubten Jigme Norbu and Colin Turnbull, *Tibet*, Penguin Books (Harmondsworth, 1976); p. 305.

[15] *Mahāvagga* I. 11. 1. A stock phrase.

[16] For a canonical example of obscurantism, see the *Anāthapiṇḍikovāda Sutta*, M. III. 258.

In this respect Ānandasiri's rediscovery of the simple daily schedule has an air of inevitability; and indeed he shares the schedule with, among others, the tradition descending from Paññānanda to Ñāṇārāma. What he does not share with them is the excitement and personal momentum which he derived from his independent discovery.

In one sense, of course, putting this into practice was a problem amenable to solution purely by organization, self-discipline, and a certain amount of learning. The basic framework of the day is founded on the necessity of begging and eating the main meal before noon. The tasks of both personal hygiene and keeping the monastery clean fill out other parts of the day. The rest of the time is devoted to meditation and study. The schedule given in the commentaries, in fact, seems adequately to comprehend these needs.[17]

At a deeper level, Ānandasiri was continually engaged in research—chronologically this overlapped his experimentation with the *kasiṇas* and *dhutangas*—into the meaning of individual aspects of the daily schedule: for he was, after all, seeking 'the truth that made sense to him', and these acts were required to have a meaning. One such problem, for example, was the significance of the injunction, found in several texts, that the monk should go on his begging round with his eyes cast down about six feet in front of him. Ānandasiri concluded that this was the posture of a monk concentrating on his *bhāvanā*, self-cultivation; not merely a matter of external sense-constraint, *indriya-saṃvara*, but of internal occupation. On the one hand, most of his interpretations along these lines are plausible and well-substantiated in scriptures. On the other, there is always room for creativity in solving such problems, for the scriptures, extensive though they are, cannot provide every possible explanation. (I suspect, in fact, that many rules, such as those concerning deportment in the *sekhiya* section of the *Pāṭimokkha*, originated more in social than in spiritual necessity; though this does not prevent them from having a quite reasonable and consistent inner sense also. Theravāda Buddhists are well accustomed to juxtaposing social and psychological pragmatism.)

[17] See above, p. 77.

In this research Ānandasiri's solutions to individual puzzles converged toward his unitary view of the monk's life as one conducted through perpetual alertness and mental application.

But at a deeper level yet, his conclusions, and the circumstances in which he put his conclusions into practice, were coloured by that radical fundamentalism, his unremitting effort to penetrate directly to the Buddha's time and to the presumably most genuine understanding of the monastic life which emanated from the Buddha himself. This had various consequences. For example, he was inclined to set more store by putatively earlier texts, such as the *Sutta Nipāta*, than by later ones, such as the commentaries. He grew more and more sceptical of the *Visuddhimagga*. And he settled on a text which gave him, he thought, a genuine glimpse into that most attractive yet most hidden mystery, the actual conduct of the forest life under the Buddha. This was the *Cūḷagosinga Sutta* (M. I. 31), which he had discovered already when he was at Māligātänna, and from which he preached his very first sermon. It would not, I think, be too great a simplification to say that the special style of his hermitage grew out of his reading of this discourse.

The discourse concerns a visit of the Buddha to three monks living in the forest. He enquires after their way of life, and they reply in some circumstantial detail. The Buddha praises these practices, and then, after leaving, he recommends to a supernatural being[18] that, if those layfolk from among whom the three took the robes were to recall the monks in piety and gladness (*pasannacitta*), it would redound to the layfolk's benefit and happiness. It is not, however, the plot of the discourse, but the content of the hermitage life as described therein, that riveted Ānandasiri's attention.

The very beginning of the discourse confirmed Ānandasiri in the conviction, already current in his milieu, that the proper locus of the meditative life is the forest, since it is there that the three meditators had their abode. But there is a further detail which foreshadowed Ānandasiri's especially strict interpretation of forest solitude: as the Buddha approached the hermitage, a guard first warned the Buddha off, saying, 'Do not enter this wood, ascetic, for there live within three monks intent on the spiritual quest. Do not bother them.'

[18] In Chalmers' questionable translation, 'an outlandish fairy'.

Though Ānandasiri did not on this account acquire a guard to be stationed outside his hermitage, he was encouraged in a serious view of the solitude and strict separation from the world entailed by his vocation. This had a number of consequences. The first was his choice of hermitage, today certainly the most isolated and splendidly wild one in Ceylon. This is Kuḍumbigala, which Ānandasiri first visited in 1954. Set among monumental rocks and dry forest nine miles from the nearest village, it is bordered on one side by the sea, a mile and a half away, and on two sides by Yala game park. For most of his residence there Ānandasiri and his (usually two or three) pupils were supported only through the heroic efforts of a layman, Maitrī Upāsaka, who trekked twice weekly to Potuvil, twenty miles away, for supplies. There are drip-ledge caves at Kuḍumbigala dating perhaps to the second century B.C., though since Portuguese times, the sixteenth century, these had probably sheltered only sloth bears.

If Kuḍumbigala's physical isolation set one guard over the monks' solitude, Ānandasiri is conscious that the animals which frequent the hermitage—bear, leopard, wild boar, buffalo, elephant—set another. Ānandasiri's statement, that the animals are 'our friends', has several senses, but one is certainly that their presence effectively keeps away casual visitors.

Furthermore, Ānandasiri is not above acting as guard himself. Like many other hermitage monks he is pursued, in Gananath Obeyesekere's happy phrase, by 'the relentless piety of the masses'. So he puts strict limits on the frequency and nature of visits by laymen to the hermitage, and is capable, on occasion, of ejecting unwanted visitors from it. Like Hans Castorp on his mountain, the monks are hermetically sealed away from the world.

The intensity of this idea of isolation was reinforced in Ānandasiri by another passage in the discourse. The Buddha asks whether the monks are living an 'unrelenting, ardent, and resolute' life. Their spokesman replies that they are, and he instances this practice:

Here, sir, the first back from the alms-round sets up the seats, fetches water to drink and wash up with, and puts out the scrap-bowl. (The last back either eats the left-overs, or disposes of them properly.) He puts away the seats, water, and scrap-bowl, and sweeps the dining-

hall. Whoever sees that the water jars are empty signals with his hands for help. We do not, on that account, break the silence. And then, sir, once every five nights we sit down together to discuss the teaching.[19]

Ānandasiri translates these provisions into practice with a vengeance. In silence, he and his pupils gather their alms (from an alms-hall, *piṇḍapāta-śālāva*, at the boundary of the hermitage proper), retire to eat and clean up. This in effect makes eating—which is after all the classic vice of the monastic life—not so much a solemn occasion as one devoted to reflection on its purely biological function, the maintenance of the body in health.[20] This is all quite orthodox, but at other relatively strict hermitages the injunction against talking is not nearly so firmly enforced.

Ānandasiri extends this ban on talking, except for the most necessary purposes, to the entire day, and consequently his pupils spend most of their time alone in the forest. Consider this typical day in the life of Sumana, a monk who, in April 1975, was preparing for his higher ordination by studying and memorizing the *Pāṭimokkha*. He rose at half past three in the morning, washed his face and hands, and made tea. He then reflected meditatively on the qualities of the Buddha (*Buddhānussati*). (This puts him on his mettle, for he is to regard his situation as if—but only *as if*—that great preceptor, 'the teacher of gods and men', were actually present.) He then pursued his own meditation topic until daylight began to creep through the forest. He swept his cave and courtyard, and before six o'clock walked the mile from his cave to the dining hall, where he ate rice porridge prepared by some laymen who had come for the purpose. He then went to Ānandasiri's cave for tuition. When that was finished he did not have time to return to his cave, so he retired to a secluded spot for a while, and joined the others at nine o'clock, after a bath, for the alms-round. On this day, since a group of laymen had come, Ānandasiri preached, and thereafter all the monks retired within the hermitage to their meal. Sumana walked back to his cave, had a rest, and then spent the afternoon studying.

At about five o'clock he went to Ānandasiri's cave again with

[19] These are also found in the Vinaya, *Mahāvagga* IV. 1 and X. 4.

[20] See A. III. 16. This is *bhojane mattaññutā*, 'understanding the measure in eating'.

another monk, by prearrangement. A concrete channel had to be built on a rock ledge to direct rain water into a reservoir for the dry season. Tea was prepared and drunk, and Sumana, who had been a brick-layer before taking the robes, led the others in work. (There was a slight holiday atmosphere on this occasion, because the anthropologist was present, and a certain amount of very nearly frivolous conversation took place.) Before dark everyone dispersed to his own cave, for jungle animals are particularly nervous, and therefore dangerous, after dark. Sumana studied and meditated until about ten o'clock, and went to sleep.

The pious and nearly devotional meditations and worship before a Buddha image, which occur thrice daily at other hermitages, are conspicuously absent from this schedule. This is partly for practical reasons—it would be difficult for everyone to gather morning, noon, and night—but is also a logical consequence of Ānandasiri's concentratedly intellective training ideal. (Jinavaṃsa, by contrast, especially enjoys the warm, clean atmosphere of Buddha worship, and of other communal ceremonies, and tends to expand the liturgical portions of the schedule.) What in a sense replaces the worship are the discussions—in practice more nearly monologues, for there are seldom monks present who are peers of Ānandasiri—which frequently take place in the afternoon under the trees, or, on moonlit nights, after sunset in the open. These are not regularly scheduled as the discourse prescribes, but they play a large and important part in the monks' lives.

It may seem that this schedule is so strict as to approach self-mortification; and indeed Ānandasiri realizes (as do others in the *saṃsthāva*) that only a relatively small proportion of otherwise hardy forest-dwellers are able to stand the rigours of silence, solitude, and physical danger at Kuḍumbigala. One German monk went so far as to characterize the place as the most unpleasant and lonely hermitage he had ever visited. In his view, and presumably in the view of other monks who have fled after a brief stay, Ānandasiri's hermitage is the abode, not of freedom, but of bondage, and the experience there is one of compression into a fearful deprivation. A *tapōvanaya*, a penitent's grove, indeed.

But this is neither Ānandasiri's view, nor that of the monks

who have prospered there. For there is another section in Ānandasiri's beloved discourse on the forest life that has profound implications for his conception and practice of the life. The Buddha asks the three monks whether they are living successfully together: 'And how is it then, monks? Do you live in harmony, on friendly terms, without argument, mixing like milk and water, regarding each other with affectionate eyes?' To this the spokesman replies:

It occurs to each of us in these terms, Sir: it is to my profit, very much to my profit, that I live together with such celibates. And therefore I am disposed in mind, speech, and body to acts of loving-kindness towards them, whether openly or secretly. Hence we each think: why not give up my own will, and act by the will of these venerable colleagues? And we do so. Our bodies are several, Sir, but our mind is surely one.

This statement connects Ānandasiri's single-minded pursuit of that chief Buddhist virtue, wisdom, with the other Buddhist virtue, *mettā* or loving-kindness. The statement in fact represents a balancing and a resolution, within the compass of the meditator's life, of these two apparent opposites which seem so irreconcilable: if one is to pursue self-cultivation, how can one indulge in compassion? And, if one is devoted to concern for others, how can one pursue self-cultivation? Richard Gombrich describes this 'conflict', this 'tension', and points out that it is represented in the contrasting ideals of the *arhat*, the monk who finds salvation for himself, and the *bodhisattva*, the hero who seeks spiritual virtues to benefit the world; these ideals are fused in the Buddha. Gombrich writes that for Buddhists everywhere the Buddha, 'who has added love to self-restraint, is infinitely superior to the mere *arhat*, who does not benefit others after achieving enlightenment himself. Even those who regarded the *arhat* ideal as the *summum bonum* did not consider it the *solum bonum*: for all Buddhists love is a great good.'[21] He is constrained to make the point because of the difficulty that Westerners have in understanding the alleged negativity, or selfishness, of the *arhat* ideal, so contrary to that ideal of worldly engagement which the West has inherited from our Protestant and secular forebears.

[21] Richard Gombrich, *Precept and Practice*, Oxford University Press (Oxford, 1971), p. 321.

For Ānandasiri this is not a problem; nor do I think it is a problem to most Buddhists. The spokesman's reply to the Buddha, revealing the inner sense of those frequent canonical injunctions prescribing harmony in the monastery, is merely a special application within the circle of the monastic life of a more generally held view. Within the monastery it is to each individual's advantage to submit to the will of his 'wise companions' (*kalyāṇa mittā*). But this is not merely a matter of being seen to be kind to one another, and therefore to garner kindness in return, for one is also to minister *secretly* to one's fellows. *Mettā*, in other words love, has a beneficent effect in itself, for oneself and others, quite apart from the principle of self-interest. In practice I gather that this secret ministration is experienced by Ānandasiri's pupils as confidence that, however difficult their life, it is ultimately guided by him for their benefit. At Kuḍumbigala there certainly rises to the surface, sometimes, a common sensibility, partly siege mentality, a unified front against common adversity, and partly a shared sense of adventure.

The general view of loving-kindness may be said to be composed, roughly, of two parts: an emotional base, in which *mettā* is considered a value in itself and a sufficient motive to explain action, as in Jātaka tales: and a reasoned superstructure, in which *mettā* is explained in terms of psychological pragmatism and therefore connected intimately with *paññā*, wisdom.

In his excellent and comprehensive survey of *mettā* as a meditation method, Vajirañāṇa Mahāthera reveals the deep piety about *mettā* which he shares with Ānandasiri and other Sinhalese Buddhists:

> . . . Mettā, unbounded benevolence or friendliness, in itself emphasizes the positive nature of the self-sacrifice and devoted service of the aspirant . . . . Mettā, as exemplified in the Buddha and in his followers and expounded in the Scriptures, is not an evanescent exhibition of emotion, but a sustained and habitual mental attitude of service, good-will, and friendship, which finds expression in deed, word and thought.[22]

He also points out that *mettā*, along with such closely allied virtues as compassion (*karuṇā*; indeed I think it reasonable to

[22] Vajirañāṇa Mahāthera, *Buddhist Meditation in Theory and Practice*, M. D. Gunasena and Co. (Colombo, 1962), p. 280.

treat the two as being essentially the same thing), is 'the expression of those positive qualities and that sublime and perfect purity and tenderness of heart, which gradually become manifest in the religious aspirant as he proceeds with his training'.[23] In general, *mettā* is thought of as being cool, and cooling to the spirit, the opposite of anger. Though there are injunctions in the canon and tales among the Jātakas which suggest a self-sacrifice similar to Christian martyrdom, in fact the dominant idea of *mettā* is that its fruits are immediate: one can ward off poisonous snakes, stop a charging elephant, or save one's life from a robber,[24] and one can also directly help others. It is not, however, an effusive emotion: rather than going the extra mile, as in the Christian parable, one would go just as far as is necessary for one's neighbour's welfare. As an emotional referent it represents a deep aspiration to the well-being and harmony of *individuals*: the notion of a loving community of believers, here or in the hereafter, is no part of it.

And it is on this aspiration to the welfare of individuals that the connection of *mettā* to *paññā* is erected. Let us follow this reasoning to show how Ānandasiri applies it at Kuḍumbigala.

The chief mark of existence (*lakkhana*) which is presupposed by Buddhism is *dukkha*, suffering, that all-pervasive quality which necessitates the teaching of the Buddha in the first place. *Dukkha* is experienced most intimately by every individual, indeed by every individual *being*, whether human or animal. This lamentable state furthermore drives these individual beings, thirsting for satisfaction, from one temporary fulfilment, or frustration, to the next. It is the moment by moment dynamic of this endless quest for ease and relief which the meditator witnesses most intimately in his introspection.

But he also witnesses it in others. The directions for insight meditation prescribe that he note not only that he breathes himself, but that others breathe: that not only do one's own thoughts rise and fall, but that others' do as well; and in general that the facts of impermanence, suffering, and the absence of a compellingly real essence are present in all beings. In other words—this is an observation given special emphasis by Ānandasiri to his pupils—the acquisition of wisdom through insight

[23] Ibid.

[24] See references in ibid., pp. 286, 297.

meditation entails not merely an introspective understanding of oneself, but also a fundamentally introspective, if outwardly directed, understanding of the world of living beings. All desire fulfilment, all wish to escape suffering, but only some are fortunate enough to be in a position to grasp this universal fact and act on it: these are the monks, those lucky to be born human and within earshot of the Buddha's message. With the 'eye of wisdom', then, the monk sees his own mind and that of others as working, as far as these most important matters are concerned, in exactly the same way. The meditator comprehends that inwardly all beings are like himself.

Therefore—this is the vital step in reasoning—just as the meditator wishes himself well, so he should wish well to others. This step in reasoning—and indeed the introspective movement which it presupposes—is expressed in this verse, attributed to the Buddha, which Ānandasiri quoted to me:

> He searched every direction in his mind,
> And found nothing dearer than self.
> Since their selves are dear to others,
> He who loves himself harms no one.[25]

The *Visuddhimagga* (IX. 1–11) goes so far as to suggest that the meditator practise *mettā* as a meditation by beginning with this sentiment: he should first wish himself well, and only then go on to wish others well.

Hence we might say that wisdom in its untechnical sense, that trained sensibility of which I have written, is directed not only to discerning the springs of suffering in oneself, but to discerning it in others as well. Ānandasiri's chief pupil made the point graphically to me one night at Kuḍumbigala. Some farmers had opened up a plot of rice grown by slash-and-burn agriculture in the forest a couple of miles from Kuḍumbigala, and the crop was ripening. For this period they must be in the fields day and night to guard the nourishing plants from hungry animals. On this occasion we could make out that an elephant must have broken into the field, for the farmers were shouting and throwing fire-crackers, and the elephant was trumpeting. The monk asked me what I made of the sound, and I told him. He agreed with my interpretation, that it was indeed an ele-

[25] S. I., p. 75.

phant in the fields, but he then said, 'In truth, Sir, it is something else. Those are the cries of *dukkha*. The animals are hungry, the men are hungry, and they all crave for the rice.'

In the special circumstances of Kuḍumbigala, however, this attitude of sympathy is not merely passive, for it is in fact the basis for the monks' successful relationship with the forest animals. Ānandasiri explained his practice in these terms:

Consider the bear, Sir. The bear is one mass of suffering. It is hungry, it is thirsty, it wanders around all day and night looking for food and water. It is afraid of everything that moves. And its fur is filled with ticks, some the size of a thumbnail, and however much it scratches, it will never be rid of them.

Hence, he went on to explain, he teaches his pupils to view the animals in these terms, as fellow-sufferers—of, be it noted, uncertain temperament and prey to sudden rage or fear—and therefore to be neither afraid nor aggressive toward them. In practice this has meant that, in more than twenty-five years, no one has been attacked by an animal at Kuḍumbigala, though forest villagers have often been attacked and killed. This use of *mettā* is inspired, no doubt, by the quasi-magical powers attributed to it in the canon and in Buddhist folklore, but Ānandasiri, ever the sceptic, glosses this with his own argument, bolstered by introspective reasoning.[26]

This sympathy has even more active consequences. The monk's trained sensibility is directed chiefly, it is true, to understanding and curing his own suffering; but in so far as it is directed at others, it is concerned, at the least, to ameliorate their suffering. Ānandasiri's monks do in fact minister to the helpless and threatened—motherless squirrels, abandoned bear cubs, and the like—who come to their notice. A German monk who lived some months with Ānandasiri expressed the matter thus:

. . . one observes how the tiny ponds among the rocks dry up day by day and the swarming tadpoles . . . must in the end die painfully. Often enough one stands helpless in the presence of such massive suffering and can only feel unlimited compassion; but there are also cases in which one can actively help. Thus, for example, I fished all the tadpoles out of the aforesaid pond and let them go in a larger pond. Compared to the suffering that surrounds us, such modest help dis-

[26] See for example the *Khandha Paritta* of A. II., p. 72.

appears into nothing—but this reflection is merely a completely abstract thought. Consider for a moment: every being suffers in itself all the suffering of the world. When we recognize this suffering, whether in men or animals, we should try to fend it off or at least to diminish it, and therefore practise Buddhism in the purest sense.[27]

But what, we may be moved to ask, of the farmers crying in the fields? Do the monks devote themselves to the welfare of tadpoles and ignore the human suffering before them? And the answer is, of course they do not; but, as in their relations to the animals, they observe a measure, doing what is possible in their estate. Ānandasiri's special status, as a highly respected and unquestionably serious forest monk, in fact, gives him a great deal of leverage. On my last visit to him, in December 1979, I met him first in Colombo. He had gone to have some new eyeglasses fitted . . . and to introduce the leader of a young farmer's association to some of his supporters, who were willing to loan the young farmers the money to buy a tractor. After we returned to Kuḍumbigala, he had to visit the nearest village to arrange for his mail, and while there he was asked to settle a quarrel among his local supporters, and to recommend to a lay charity organization that money be given to build a well.

From Ānandasiri's point of view, the difficulty is to limit this engagement, which threatens to engulf him, not only in requests for this sort of help, but in invitations to preach and make merit. He must draw the line somewhere, to keep himself free for his chief purpose, the conduct of the forest life with all that it implies. It was to this end, for example, that he refused to let the land at Kuḍumbigala be made over to him, but insisted that it be kept as an animal sanctuary by the government. I surmise, however, that the decisions which allow him to preserve his freedom are not laboriously thought out, but well up from a deeply cultivated sense of what it is in his power to accomplish and what it is not. Temporarily and provisionally it is possible and necessary to allay much suffering; but permanent and really effective alleviation is possible only for each individual in himself, and even there the underlying processes, of change and decay, go on unchecked. There is a very great

[27] Bhikkhu Berlin Shantideva, 'Kudumbigala, Impressionen aus einem Waldklosters', in *50 Jahre Buddhistisches Haus*, German Dharmadhuta Society (Berlin, 1974), p. 61. My translation.

deal in the world about which the monk must cultivate equanimity.

Ānandasiri, in reply to my questioning him over the stewardship of Kuḍumbigala, noted that at the time, 1975, there was no one to succeed him. Without him, he said, 'What would become of these bear cubs [that we had rescued]? What would become of Kuḍumbigala? But I can think about these things only to a certain extent. I don't own this place. I don't even own this body.'

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